AFRICA RECOVERY

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African delegates press for a "development round"

WTO impasse in Seattle spotlights inequities of global trading system

By **Michael Fleshman**

Seattle

After the opening-day events of the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle were effectively cancelled by street protests, Director-General Mike Moore assured the handful of delegates who slipped past the picketers that the 30 November-3 December summit was "doomed to succeed." In the end, the WTO meeting — the "Battle in Seattle" — was simply doomed.

The WTO's Third Ministerial meeting was marked by the biggest demonstrations in recent US history, a bitter deadlock between the US, Europe and Japan over agricultural subsidies and industrial protectionism, and an unprecedented revolt by developing countries against a process that systematically excluded their delegates from the negotiating rooms. Divided and angry, the exhausted ministers adjourned without launching a new round of trade talks or even issuing a closing communiqué.

AFP / Peter Muhly

Demonstrators at the WTO meeting in Seattle. Street protests and a rebellion by developing countries contributed to the breakdown of the trade summit.

For African and other developing country delegations, whose refusal to accept an accord reached over their heads scuttled any remaining hope for an 11th-hour agreement, the failure of the Seattle ministerial meeting seems to offer both dangers and opportunities.

Despite the adoption of sometimes painful economic reforms by many African countries over the past two decades, the promised benefits of trade liberalization — increased foreign direct investment, easier access to Northern markets and expanded technology transfer and technical assistance — have not materialized. Fully 70 percent of the wealth generated by trade liberalization has flowed to developed countries. By some measures the current rules governing world trade, set largely by the industrialized countries over the course of the 1986-94 Uruguay Round agreements, have only contributed to Africa's economic woes.

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Zimbabwean Industry and Commerce Minister Nathan Shamuyarira, addressing a plenary session on 2 December, a day after the meeting finally began, reminded delegates that the WTO's charter commits the trade body to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development. Yet, he added, "it is an undisputed fact that the general experience of developing countries like Zimbabwe in the implementation of the Uruguay Round agreements has been disappointing.... In fact, the economic situations of our countries have in many cases deteriorated."

"Here in Seattle and on the eve of the new millennium," he said, "we need to look at the balance sheet and take stock of how we have done so far in achieving ... the noble goals we set for ourselves at the inception of this organization."

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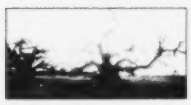

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Wanted: a just, humane world

Ensure the well-being of every child and adolescent, insists UNICEF

By **Frehiwot Bekele**

Within a generation, the world could — and should — become a place where every infant is properly nurtured and cared for, where every child receives a quality basic education, and where every adolescent is given the support and guidance he or she needs in the difficult transition to adulthood, says the *State of the World's Children 2000*, published in December by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

UNICEF / LeMoyne

Women and children applaud the delivery of vaccines at a village health clinic in Nigeria.

Acknowledging the progress made in protecting children over the course of this century and in the decade since the 1989 adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF says much more remains to be done. It draws particular attention to three tragedies of which children and women are currently the main victims, largely in the developing world: armed conflict, HIV/AIDS and poverty. And the report adds that women are victims of these ills in disproportionate numbers due to gender discrimination.

Victims of war, AIDS

Nearly 90 per cent of victims of war today are civilians, mainly women and children. Around 540 million children (one in four) "live with the ominous and ever-present hum of violence that might erupt any time," or are displaced or made refugees by ongoing conflicts. In the last decade, more than 2 million children have died as a result of armed conflicts, while 6 million others have been injured or disabled and hundreds of thousands have been conscripted into war as "soldiers, sex slaves or porters." Between 8,000 and 10,000 children are killed by landmines every year. Conflicts in Africa accounted for more than half of all war-related deaths in 1996 and resulted in more than 8 million refugees and displaced persons.

Each day, 8,500 children and young people around the world are infected with HIV, and 2,500 women die of AIDS, UNICEF states. Globally, nearly 13 million children under the age of 15 have been orphaned by AIDS, 10 million of them in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, 22.5 million people have HIV. In 1998, 2 million Africans died from AIDS, compared to the 200,000 mostly women and children who died because of conflicts. Life expectancy in Zambia has dropped from 50 to 40 years since 1990 because of HIV/AIDS, while in Botswana, where it had been projected to exceed 69 years by 2000-2005 in the absence of AIDS, it is now predicted to plummet to 41 years in that period.

'Merciless poverty'

Per capita income is lower today in 80 countries than it was a decade ago, says UNICEF. One in five of the earth's inhabitants (1.2 billion people, including 600 million children) live in "unyielding and merciless poverty," each surviving on less than $1 per day. Some 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 work, 50-60 million of them in "hazardous circumstances." An estimated 130 million primary-school-age children, 60 per cent of them girls, cannot attend school because their parents cannot pay fees, they have to work to contribute to their families' incomes, or they are in conflict situations. Each day 30,500 boys and girls under the age of five die mainly of preventable causes, and each year 585,000 women die of complications during pregnancy or child birth.

We all know what is needed, says the report, to alleviate poverty and improve living conditions: ensuring universal access to basic social services, such as safe water, sanitation, basic education and health care (including family planning). This would cost $70-80 bn annually, in a $30-trillion world economy. And it could be achieved through implementation of UNICEF's 20/20 Initiative, which advocates the allocation of 20 per cent of both national budgets and official development assistance (ODA) to vital social services. However, ODA has fallen by more than 20 per cent in the 1992-97 period, UNICEF observes.

One reason why poor countries find it difficult to provide basic services to their populations is their external debt obligations. Cameroon, for example, spent 36 per cent of its national budget on debt servicing in 1996-97, compared to 4 per cent on basic social services. Tanzania's debt payments were four times what it spent on primary education, and nine times its basic health spending. In 1997, sub-Saharan Africa's external debt amounted to 108 per cent of its gross national product.

The State of the World's Children 2000 sets the scene for a conference on children which UNICEF will hold in late 2001 under the auspices of the UN General Assembly. The conference will bring together governments, international institutions, a wide range of civil society organizations and the private sector to promote the well-being of children and adolescents. ■

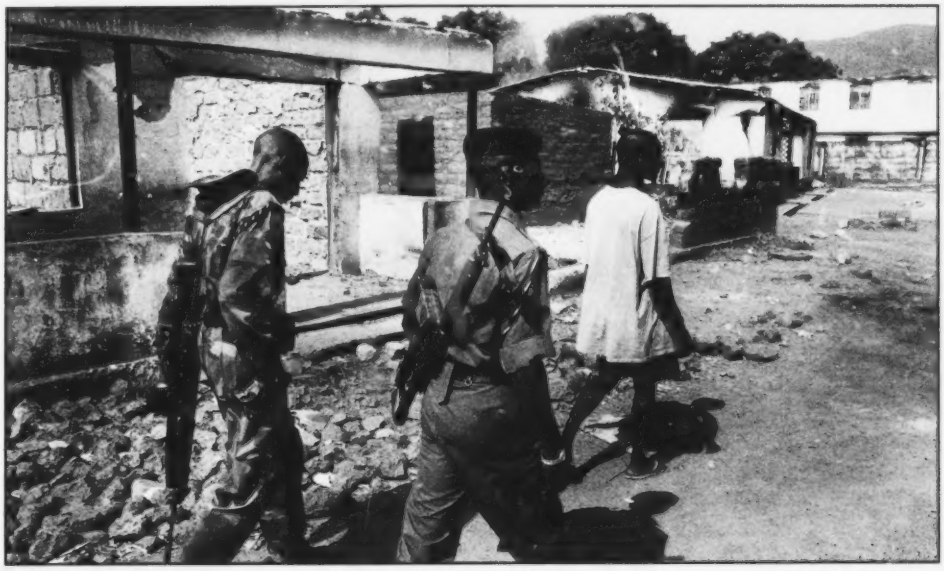
Sharing Africa's peacekeeping burden

UN Secretary-General's report stirs Security Council debate on double standards

By **Michael Fleshman**

In Sierra Leone, international peacekeepers fought a brutal rebel movement to a standstill and created the military conditions necessary for a peace agreement. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, international mediators doggedly pursued a cease-fire accord and an end to a conflict that has embroiled troops from six African countries.

But instead of the familiar UN blue helmets, peacekeepers in Sierra Leone fought under the banner of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). When the warring parties in the Democratic Republic of Congo gathered in Lusaka, Zambia, in July to sign a cease-fire pact, they endorsed an agreement initiated and mediated mainly by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), with the UN playing a supporting role.



West African peacekeepers in a Sierra Leone village damaged by civil war: Africans are taking more initiative to end their own conflicts, but are getting little international support.

Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo are the latest examples of the changing relationship between the UN and Africa in meeting the challenge of peacekeeping and conflict resolution on the continent. Conflict prevention, and the balance between African and international obligations for maintaining peace, were again on the UN agenda on 29-30 September when the Security Council opened debate at the ministerial level. The ministers took up Secretary-General Kofi Annan's progress report on implementation of the proposals in his 1998 report to the Security Council, *The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa.*

Mr. Annan outlined a series of steps taken by the UN to implement his recommendations to expand African peacekeeping capabilities, improve and coordinate delivery of humanitarian and development assistance, and accelerate measures to ease Africa's poverty and crushing debt burden. Specific actions include:

- Adoption of Security Council resolutions to strengthen the enforcement and monitoring of regional arms embargoes; to improve security for African refugees and increase aid to countries hosting refugees; and to expand security cooperation with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and sub-regional bodies.
- The appointment of special representatives and envoys to assist African mediation efforts in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Horn of Africa and Burundi.
- An increase from 12 to 23 African countries participating in the UN peacekeeping Stand-by Arrangement, in which member states maintain personnel or materiel in readiness for rapid deployment.

As Mr. Annan was speaking, the first UN military observers were being deployed to the Democratic Republic of Congo, following Security Council authorization in early August. Then on 23 October, the Security Council authorized a UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone.

Mixed progress

Progress towards resolving and preventing conflicts since the report's release was mixed, Mr. Annan told the Security Council. "Africa today, on the eve of the new millennium, reveals a remarkable combination of accomplishments and unresolved problems, of opportunities seized and chances missed." At a time when half the world's war-related fatalities are occurring in Africa, "There are places in Africa where governments persist in spending money on weapons they can ill afford for wars they should not fight; where conflicts are seen as business opportunities for arms merchants and rebel groups alike."

"Yet there are also places, many more than is commonly recognized, where we are witnessing dramatic changes for the better." The return of elected government in Nigeria, the smooth transfer of authority from Mr. Nelson Mandela to President Thabo Mbeki in South Africa, sustained efforts at economic reform and political pluralism, and African diplomatic initiatives in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau and the Horn of Africa, he noted, are signs that "good governance, accountability, transparency and the rule of law are slowly gaining ground." He called for greater aid to African countries making good faith efforts at reform, telling the Security Council, "What the outside world may not have noticed is that much of what it has been calling for has now happened."

The lack of international attention, Mr. Annan cautioned, can kill. In August, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization reported that nearly 10 million sub-Saharan Africans

required emergency food aid. It identified war and internal conflict as the sole or contributing factor in 13 of the 16 most vulnerable countries. The Secretary-General, however, noted that available funding for humanitarian needs in Africa is only half of the $800 mn needed, while landmine removal operations have been sharply curtailed through lack of funding.

"The Secretariat's efforts are severely constrained — and in some cases even jeopardized — by the absence of resources," Mr. Annan said. He warned that the disproportionate international response to recent crises in Europe and Asia compared to Africa was damaging the credibility of the UN. "There is no excuse for not doing what is do-able and reasonable.... 'Africa fatigue' is an affront to the idea of a caring international community."

Partnership or double standard?

But "Africa fatigue" and African frustration were very much in evidence during the Security Council ministerial debate. A marked reluctance on the part of the major industrialized states to support peacekeeping missions on the continent since the 1992-95 mission in Somalia has shifted greater responsibility to African states and the OAU, ECOWAS and SADC. But the North has failed to provide commensurate financial, logistical and diplomatic resources.

Many ministers from developing countries contrasted the rapid and massive international interventions to restore peace in Kosovo and East Timor with what Gabon's Foreign Minister Jean Ping termed the Security Council's "procrastinating" in places like Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo — delays that could imperil the success of the fragile accords and allow Council resolutions to be flouted.

Mr. Leonardo Santos, Mozambican Ambassador to the UN, praised the UN partnership with Africa in peacekeeping, but reminded Council members that responsibility for peace in Africa, as in the rest of the world, ultimately lies with them. "Regional peacekeeping missions and other efforts by Africa can therefore be no excuse for the Security Council to shirk its responsibilities to African countries," he said. "We have had to bear such a responsibility in West Africa, for instance, not only because we feel a sense of ownership for confronting and managing conflict, but also because the response of the international community has recently been either muted or lukewarm."

Nigeria has spent billions of dollars and lost hundreds of lives during peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Its ambassador, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, bluntly urged the Security Council "to match its words with deeds and to apply a single standard and not a continuing double standard when responding to conflicts in Africa compared with the response in the rest of the world.... It is neither fair nor wise to expect a few countries to shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden."

Ugandan Ambassador Semakula Kiwanuka said that the failure of the Security Council to prevent genocide in Rwanda raised disturbing questions about Africa's exclusion from the global collective security system: "The contrasts between what went on there and what happened in Kosovo and recently in East Timor are too glaring. Many of us Africans see the situation being worse than benign neglect." Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy endorsed the African view, charging that anything less than full and equal attention to African security needs by the Security Council "is as shameful as it is inadequate."

Whose obligation?

However, Portuguese Ambassador Antonio Monteiro rejected the allegation of Security Council delay: "It is unrealistic to hope or to demand that the United Nations provide quick and full solutions to the conflicts in Africa...and impose peace on those who deliberately choose war... While the international community is accused of showing a lesser interest in, or commitment to, resolving African conflicts than those elsewhere, the decisions of the Security Council ... that seek to guarantee peace are openly flouted."

US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke also called for greater African efforts, arguing, "Where an international presence is required, the United Nations has a vital role to play. But we must also press the people and leaders of Africa to solve the problems on their own and, above all, to prevent them before they begin."

Many resolutions, few solutions

There was far greater agreement on the underlying economic and social causes of conflict in Africa, yet the debate began amid grim evidence that Africa is continuing to lose ground in the global economy. Figures on global foreign direct investment (FDI) released in late September, for example, showed that while such flows increased by 40 per cent in 1998 to $644 bn, Africa's 33 least developed countries attracted just $2.2 bn in overseas investment. This was up slightly for the sixth consecutive year, but still

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Annan seeks General Assembly support

On 8 December, Secretary-General Annan took his campaign to accelerate action on his 1998 proposals to a special session of the General Assembly convened by its President, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia.

Seeking to build support in the universal body, Mr. Annan stated that, while the UN is already broadly active in Africa, it needs to be "engaged more effectively" in order to bring about lasting progress. Africa's standing as a UN priority should be echoed in the Assembly's own financial and budgetary priorities, he noted.

He suggested three ways in which the Assembly could help transform the aspirations expressed in his recommendations into concrete achievements. First, it should take stock of progress made to implement the 1998 proposals and consolidate the disparate actions taken so far. "Otherwise the proliferation of initiatives threatens to create more problems than solutions."

Second, the Assembly could seek innovative means for creating effective partnerships to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Africa. He urged members to support an initiative — currently being forged between the UN, African governments, developed countries and NGOs — aimed at mapping new ways to fight the epidemic.

Lastly, he asked the Assembly to focus on new ways of enhancing assistance to post-conflict societies, including cancelling external debt obligations. "Given the essential link between peace and prosperity, we cannot hope to achieve lasting development as long as conflict goes unchallenged and prevention is not a priority."

A Working Group, made up of a cross-section of African countries and other states concerned with Africa's future, could undertake this work, he suggested. "What gives me confidence today," Mr. Annan concluded, "is that African states are more than ever taking hold of their destiny and finding solutions to their own problems."

New debt deal on shaky ground

Stance of US Congress raises doubts about total funding for revised HIPC debt relief package

By Christina Katsouris

Late last September, governors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank approved changes to the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative. This annual meeting in Washington of senior officials of creditor and debtor countries resulted in the promise of deeper and faster debt relief for more — mostly African — HIPC candidates, and a stronger focus on poverty reduction. But in mid-November, the US Congress refused to authorize $600 mn in US financing for the HIPC Trust Fund, one of the main vehicles for channeling debt relief. This could delay implementation of the new measures, or at the very worst, risks causing the whole deal to unravel.

There had been extensive horse-trading over the US budget. Congress approved $110 mn for President Bill Clinton's plan to write off 100 per cent of debts owed to the US by any country qualifying for HIPC relief. This goes further than most other bilateral creditors that have so far agreed to limit relief on HIPCs' bilateral commercial debt to around 90 per cent in most cases. Congress also approved gold sales by the IMF to finance part of the Fund's $2.3 bn contribution to debt relief.

But the rejection by Congress of President Clinton's request for the Trust Fund could have repercussions. That Trust Fund channels the contributions of all other multilateral institutions to HIPC debt relief. Mr. Clinton had pledged the $600 mn to top up the contributions of poorer multilateral banks — notably, the African Development Bank — unable to fund their share (see box above).

According to analysts, some $7 bn may be needed in 2000 to cover debt relief deals. Recent pledges from major creditors had made this target attainable — only $350 mn of financing still needed to be found. The Congressional decision has widened the financing gap to $950 mn. It may have also undermined the pledges of other creditors due to the interlocking nature of their commitments. This "burden-sharing" principle has been fundamental to the HIPC initiative. It binds all creditors in a series of bilateral and multilateral deals with debtor countries intended to reduce their total debt to "sustainable" levels.

Despite the setback, some debt lobbyists are not yet writing off the revised debt relief pack-

Uncertain funding for HIPC-2

The new deal will cost creditors around $27 bn to provide relief to 36 countries, roughly double the funding required for HIPC-1. Bilateral creditors are to contribute around $13.5 bn by writing off up to 90 per cent of commercial debt, and "more if necessary" to reduce each HIPC country's debt to "sustainable" levels.

The IMF contribution to HIPC-2 is $2.3 bn, the World Bank's is $5.1 bn and that of other multilateral institutions is $6 bn. However, some regional institutions, including the African Development Bank, are not fully able to finance their share. Bilateral creditors and the IMF have agreed to put money into the HIPC Trust Fund to cover the shortfall.

The HIPC-2 package aims to deliver debt relief sooner than under HIPC-1, which set a basic six-year time frame before actual debt reduction. Under HIPC-1, after being deemed eligible, a country would continue servicing its debts at old rates while successfully meeting performance targets during two successive periods of IMF monitoring under the enhanced structural adjustment facility (ESAF). The first three years would bring it to "decision point," when creditors set the final targets for "sustainable" debt. The second three years would bring a country to "completion point," when it would begin to get debt reduction.

Now, HIPC-2 provides for "interim relief" that reduces debt service payments during the monitoring period. It also introduces "floating" completion points. Rather than a period of up to six years before actual debt reduction, the floating system in theory enables a debtor to qualify for debt reduction as soon as it has successfully implemented macroeconomic and poverty reduction policies agreed with the IMF and World Bank.

Already, there are lessons to be learned from HIPC-1. One of these is that not all creditors are major industrialized countries. Uganda reports that Libya, India, Nigeria, Burundi, Pakistan and Iraq have refused to reschedule or reduce bilateral debt, arguing that they are not in a position to do so.

IMF

Opening the World Bank and IMF meeting in September: World Bank President James Wolfensohn (left), with meeting Chair Mahesh Acharya, and IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus, who resigned his post in November.

US debt cancellation plan pressures other creditors

President Bill Clinton announced at the IMF/World Bank annual meetings last September that the US would cancel 100 per cent of concessional and commercial debts owed it by HIPC candidates. This amounts to $3.5 bn.

The US would write off debt service as it becomes due beginning at the HIPC decision point, and provide full debt stock cancellation at completion point.

Some observers said the precedent would help put pressure on other bilateral creditors to adopt comparable terms for HIPC countries. So far, it seems to be doing so. Japan has indicated that it is prepared to write off 100 per cent of aid credits, a policy already followed by the UK and some Nordic countries.

However, the Japanese government seems to have added an important rider to its decision, stipulating that beneficiaries of such debt cancellation would not be eligible for new Japanese aid. This puts Ghana in a dilemma, as Japan is its largest bilateral donor. Ghana is now thought likely to decline HIPC assistance to avoid foregoing future Japanese aid. Malawi is expected to follow.

The UK is considering proposals to write off up to 100 per cent of HIPC commercial obligations — debts incurred mostly on export credits insured or funded by governments. Such a write-off would cost the UK £5.25 bn ($8.6 bn), which is more than double US claims.

Gabon Finance Minister Emile Doumba (right) consults with his adviser, Mr. Michael Adande, during the Washington meeting.

age. They say the very fact that the US Congress approved two of Mr. Clinton's three requests for debt relief, against competing claims ahead of an election year, demonstrates sizeable support for debt relief in the US legislature.

"There could be a supplemental appropriation early next year that would enable countries to get debt relief as they become eligible," Ms. Lydia Williams of Oxfam International told *Africa Recovery*. "We are confident that there is sufficient momentum behind HIPC for us to win on the third part of the deal." One sign of such momentum is the recent statement in support of HIPC by Mr. Pat Robertson, an influential leader among US religious conservatives.

There are also signs that the decision by Congress has not dampened the enthusiasm of other creditors. The UK government has been considering proposals to follow the Clinton plan to raise relief on bilateral commercial debt to 100 per cent. Other bilaterals and the World Bank remain fully committed to implementing HIPC-2.

The setback has nonetheless unnerved World Bank and IMF officials who aim to reach decisions on the eligibility for HIPC debt relief of at least 10 countries in 2000, eight of which are African. The schedule includes Ghana, Cameroon and Madagascar, which are expected to qualify by virtue of the lower targets set in the new package — "HIPC-2" — for debt "sustainability." Countries may now be eligible if their debt payments exceed 150 per cent of exports or 250 per cent of revenues in net present value terms (the sum of all future debt service obligations discounted at the market interest rate). The old package — "HIPC-1" — stipulated 200-250 per cent of exports and 280 per cent of revenues.

Preliminary analyses of debt "sustainability" have been completed for Tanzania and Mauritania, and work is under way on Chad, Zambia, Malawi and Guinea, officials say. Progress on Ethiopia and Guinea-Bissau has been delayed by armed conflict.

It is not clear how the current funding uncertainties will affect Benin and Senegal. In 1998, World Bank and IMF analyses concluded that their debt could be made "sustainable" through pre-HIPC relief mechanisms — notably rescheduling and some cancellation of debts owed to the Paris Club of bilateral creditors.

Also due for review are Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali. They were deemed eligible for HIPC-1 and concluded agreements on debt relief with their major creditors. Now, the amount of relief should be recalculated to reflect the new "sustainability" ratios of HIPC-2.

Mozambique and Uganda should qualify for additional and backdated relief on HIPC-2 terms, to supplement relief gained under HIPC-1. As the first African country to qualify for actual debt reduction on HIPC-1 terms in April 1998, Uganda welcomes the new deal. Before HIPC-1, "we were paying $160 mn a year" in debt service, says Mr. Emmanuel Tumusime Mutubile, Uganda's permanent secretary to the Treasury. Now, debt repayments would fall from $120 mn a year on HIPC-1 terms to around $40 mn under HIPC-2. ■

Peacekeeping

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less than half a penny of every FDI dollar.

The continuing bad news prompted Algerian Ambassador Abdallah Baali, speaking on behalf of OAU Chairman Abdelaziz Bouteflika, to declare: "With a continually declining level of official development assistance, a suffocating debt burden, a still-meagre flow of direct foreign investment…an insignificant level of participation in world trade and among the lowest social development indicators, Africa today is a continent afflicted by serious handicaps."

The gap between the rhetoric of international partnership and the harsh reality of marginalization was underscored by Namibian Ambassador Martin Andjaba, who called on the international community to muster the political will and the material resources to meet the Secretary-General's "do-able and reasonable" standard. "Never before has a region been a subject of so many reports in the United Nations. Yet the situation seems to remain the same." ■

Africa mounts drive against graft

International Anti-Corruption Conference spotlights global malady

By **Ernest Harsch**
Durban

Welcoming delegates from Africa and other parts of the world, South African President Thabo Mbeki hoped that the 9th International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) would give "an added impetus to all of us as Africans further to intensify our own offensive against the scourge of corruption." Judging from the pervasive African participation throughout the 10-15 October deliberations, it likely will have just that effect, as the delegates return home to press for more concerted action against graft in their own countries and internationally.

Held every two years since 1983, and now organized by Transparency International, a Berlin-based advocacy group devoted to combating corruption worldwide (see box, page 12), this was the first IACC convened in Africa. It also was the largest so far, with some 1,600 registered participants from 134 countries, significantly higher than the 1,000 delegates who traveled to Lima, Peru, for the previous conference. As a result, African concerns and perspectives on corruption have been injected much more intensively into the global discussions on how best to tackle the problem.

"Meeting here on the African continent for the first time, we were moved by the special contributions made by our African colleagues, as they shared their own insights into a malaise which they share with all regions of the world," the delegates noted in their concluding declaration, the "Durban Commitment to Effective Action Against Corruption."

While the conference participants included many government officials, representatives of international donor agencies, corporate executives, prosecutors, judges, and other professionals, some of the most forceful contributions came from civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Ms. Wangari Maathai, leader of Kenya's environmental Greenbelt Movement, prompted a standing ovation during the opening plenary session after she vehemently criticized both government officials and multinational corporations for their involvement in corrupt practices across Africa, and emphasized the central role of non-governmental and citizens groups in combating the affliction. She also urged anti-corruption campaigners to not address the issue in an abstract, general way, but to "give corruption a face," that is, identify both its perpetrators and its victims.

IDC

Democratic governments must play a role "in evolving the social norms that militate against a perverted, anti-social individualism."

— Thabo Mbeki
President of South Africa

Despite some Western portrayals of Africa as a continent particularly prone to corruption, many conference speakers drew attention to the global nature of the phenomenon, citing recent scandals in the European Commission, the laundering of ill-gotten Russian funds through US banks, the contribution of corruption and cronyism to the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, and numerous other examples of large-scale malfeasance. They urged corporations to stop bribing foreign officials, and called on Northern banks to return the "blood money" stolen from developing countries and deposited in secret accounts.

While corruption's scope is worldwide, "it is especially destructive in developing countries, with their delicate economic situations. It has critically hobbled and skewed Africa's development," UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan affirmed in a message presented by Under-Secretary-General Pino Arlacchi.

"African governments in particular must get tough on this issue, and make the fight against corruption a genuine priority," Mr. Annan's message continued. "The costs of not doing so are very high — in lost resources, lost foreign investment, distorted decision making, and failing public confidence."

A drain on development

Since the main purpose of the conference was to discuss strategies for combating corruption, few participants looked in detail at specific instances of corruption or its concrete effects. But virtually all shared a common appreciation of the very serious impact corruption can have on a country's development prospects.

Hardly any country in Africa has been free of the malady. Over the past two-three years alone, exposures of corrupt allocations of land or housing have hit Botswana, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Gambia, Kenya, and São Tomé and Principe. Algeria, Benin and Egypt have been rocked by major state banking scandals, while cabinet ministers accused of financial misdeeds have been sacked or jailed in Ghana, Ethiopia, Mozambique and South Africa, among other countries.

In a few of Africa's larger economies, the losses have been staggering. A single fraudulent gold exporting scheme in Kenya cost the state treasury more than $150 mn. Under former dictatorships in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (then called Zaire), literally billions of dollars were estimated to have been siphoned off into foreign bank accounts. But even smaller economies sometimes have been hit by big losses. In Benin, managing directors of four state enterprises have been accused of misappropriating up to $62 mn, while the prime minister of São Tomé and Principe has reported to parliament that corruption in that tiny island nation seriously threatened fiscal management, in turn jeopardizing assistance from multilateral financial institutions.

"Corruption," President Festus Mogae of Botswana told the conference, "exacerbates poverty in that it effectively transfers real resources from official state coffers to the few rich and powerful." Corruption also distorts factor prices, he added, in that those who benefit

UN Daily Photo

Health clinic in Tanzania: Corruption diverts scarce public resources from social services and development needs.

from corruption "are rewarded for little or no work done and the cost of projects turns out higher than it would be." It likewise distorts economic decision-making, sometimes giving priority to development projects that may have little or no national benefit, President Mogae observed.

Studies by the World Bank estimate that countries with widespread corruption may have economic growth rates of between 0.5 per cent and 1 per cent less than would otherwise be the case. Corruption's impact, World Bank President James Wolfensohn told the conference, is felt most "by the poorest levels of society," for example in the distribution of seeds or medicines, in street and market trading, at police checkpoints and in many other areas of activity.

While corruption "bears with special cruelty upon the world's most poor," noted the conference's Durban Commitment, it also "debases human rights" and "destroys confidence in democracy and the legitimacy of governments."

In this way, widespread corruption has been seen as a contributing factor to war and civil strife, notably in Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Even on a less severe scale, it has added to political instability. Burkina Faso has been swept over the past year by major protests and strikes over the assassination of a newspaper editor investigating high-level corruption, while municipal workers in Malawi have struck to demand the ouster of corrupt city officials and conservationists in Kenya demonstrated in early 1999 to block the sale of state forest land to politically connected individuals.

Corruption, maladministration and poor governance do more than just undermine economic stability, South African Minister of Education Kader Asmal told the conference. "They undermine government in the eyes of the people. They lead to a pervasive cynicism about politics and politicians, which is disastrous for democracy."

Varied perspectives

Only limited attention was paid during the conference to assessing corruption's complex causes, but many of the participants came to the discussions with strong views about what facilitates its spread. Mr. Joseph Warioba, Chairman of Tanzania's Presidential Commission on Corruption, attributed its prevalence mainly to "greed and poverty" — the greed of those with wealth and power, leading to "grand corruption," and the poverty of ordinary civil servants, policemen and other public employees who feel driven to supplement their meagre incomes through bribes and extortion, known as "petty corruption."

Among other human rights advocates, Mr. Koigi wa Wamwere, head of the National Democratic and Human Rights Organization of Kenya, drew a strong link between corruption and undemocratic methods of rule. He noted that he himself had spent 13 years in prison for his political activities, including efforts to expose corruption.

Defining corruption primarily as a public sector problem, some speakers saw economic liberalization as the best long-term solution. Mr. Alassane Ouattara, former deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund and currently seeking to become a candidate for the presidency of Côte d'Ivoire, argued that "corrupt behaviour increases often with the size of the public sector." Consequently, he urged African countries to "try to diminish the role of the state." Chad's Minister of Finance Bichera Cherif Daoussa claimed that structural adjustment programmes reduce the scope for corruption.

Others differed sharply. Mr. John Makumbe, chairman of Transparency International-Zimbabwe, maintained that adjustment programmes and economic globalization in fact tend to worsen corruption, by promoting the interests of Western powers and opening up African economies to "vultures from the outside."

Mr. Richard Holloway, a senior analyst of PACT-Zambia, a non-governmental organization, told *Africa Recovery* that in the various African countries where he has worked, economic liberalization and privatization have widened the gap between the rich and poor, because those with power have used it to corruptly enrich themselves. "I think corruption is the flip side of privatization," he said. Ms. Maathai, from Kenya, encouraged participants to view corruption itself as a business — a "business extraordinary" — that must be checked through coordinated and forceful action.

Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), observed that corruption appears actually to have increased in recent years. Citing the former Soviet bloc in particular, where there has been an abrupt shift from state-controlled economies to market economies, he said that "jungle capitalism" and the corruption that accompanies it are mainly short-term, transitional problems. Over the long run, he said, the competitiveness of global capital "rewards the good and punishes the bad."

Speaking directly after him, Mr. J.H.

Mensah, Chairman of Ghana's Parliamentary Accounts Committee, worried about the "the ethical implications of the capitalist paradigm" and urged anti-corruption fighters not to ignore its side effects. In this system, he said, the bottom line is profits, and "the moral aspect of how the bottom line is realized becomes secondary."

In a similar vein, President Mbeki, in his opening address, warned about the market economy's "deification of material values" and insisted that democratic governments play a role "in evolving the social norms that militate against a perverted, anti-social individualism."

Citizens must be empowered to "demand accountable and transparent governance.
— Wangari Maathai
Kenyan NGO leader

"Corruption exacerbates poverty."
— Festus Mogae
President of Botswana

"Corrupt behavior increases with the size of the public sector"
— Alassane Ouattara
ex-IMF deputy head

Arsenal of measures

Whatever the views about the causes of corruption, there was wide agreement that greater effort and determination is needed, in Africa and internationally, to combat the problem. Over the years, numerous anti-corruption strategies have been announced, South African Minister of Justice Penuell Maduna observed, but many have been marked by a "lack of political will." For them to succeed, "there must be a clear commitment on the part of political leadership to combat corruption and to take decisive action against corrupt officials. The leaders themselves must be prepared to submit to scrutiny." To back up such commitment, a wide range of enforcement institutions, independent agencies and watchdog bodies are essential, many speakers emphasized.

President Mogae of Botswana explained that his country, which often has been cited internationally for its rigourous anti-corruption approach, employs an "arsenal of measures," including an autonomous Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime, a parliamentary accounts committee to ensure transparency in public spending, an ombudsman's office to hear citizens' complaints and various education and training programmes for civil servants and the general public. Thanks to a policy of "zero tolerance," officials caught in fraudulent activities have been fired, imprisoned and obliged to pay restitution. In 1997, the former chairman of the Botswana Stock Exchange was convicted and jailed for corruption.

The inauguration in May of Nigeria's first democratically elected government in 15 years has opened the way for a major process of "ethical re-engineering" in that country, Minister of Police Affairs Maj. Gen. David Jemibewon told the conference, speaking on behalf of President Olusegun Obasanjo, who was unable to attend the closing ceremony. "To sustain democracy," Gen. Jemibewon said, "we have to keep itching fingers and greedy eyes off the public till. Those in power must be accountable to the people." Amidst widespread poverty and suffering, it would amount to "criminal insensitivity for any government official to live in opulence and luxury," especially if the wealth has been "stolen from the people."

Since coming into office, the new Nigerian government has launched numerous investigations of corruption, cancelled dubious contracts, forced scores of senior military officers into retirement and seized plots of land and other properties acquired illicitly by high-level former officials. It announced that it already has recovered more than $120 mn stolen under the previous military regimes and has convinced foreign banks to freeze another $600 mn in such officials' overseas accounts. The government has introduced an Anti-Corruption Bill into parliament to provide a more effective legal framework against corruption and misappropriation of public resources.

Namibia held a national consultative conference to forge an "integrity strategy" in late 1998, reported Mr. Louis du Pisani, the country's acting deputy prosecutor. Following up on

Combating South Africa's 'blight'

As South Africa strives to build democracy and social justice from the wreckage of apartheid, corruption remains "a blight on our society," Mr. Stan Sangweni, Chairperson of the Public Service Commission, told the International Anti-Corruption Conference in Durban. Nearly a dozen different police, investigative, judicial, monitoring and auditing agencies are involved in combating this blight, with the Commission assigned the task of coordinating their work.

Opinion surveys in recent years have shown widespread public concern over corruption in South Africa, with many believing it actually has been growing worse, a view shared by former Minister of Justice Dullah Omar. In 1997 the international accounting agency Deloitte and Touche estimated total losses from public sector fraud and mismanagement in South Africa at nearly R10 bn ($1.7 bn). The country's lively, independent press regularly features major scandals on its front pages.

Some analysts argue that the relatively open discussion of corruption in South Africa today — compared with the secrecy and censorship of the apartheid era — has contributed to public perceptions about the seriousness of the problem. They also note that the apartheid system itself fostered widespread corruption. During the apartheid government's final years, numerous cases of massive fraud and graft came to light, most prominently linked to secret Defence Department funding, efforts to evade international oil sanctions, and the operations of the ethnic "homelands." In a system that denied the vast majority of the population its most basic citizenship rights, there was little scope for public transparency and accountability.

The democratic government that came into office in 1994 promised a new vision of inclusive and open governance, but also inherited some of these problems. Because of the negotiated nature of the political transition and the reconciliation policy of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), many of the administrators, civil servants and policemen of the old national and local bureaucracies were retained, along with their entrenched habits.

As in many other countries undergoing sweeping change, new opportunities for corruption also have arisen. Some ANC provincial officials have been forced from office for suspected involvement in corruption, and scandals have rocked the post office, state telecommunications enterprise, Department

its recommendations, in March 1999 the cabinet approved the creation of an anti-corruption unit within the prosecutor-general's office, with powers to both investigate and take preventive action.

Uganda, which has had its share of high-level corruption in recent times, has declared "open war" against the affliction, declared Minister for Ethics and Integrity Miria Matembe. This included the establishment in June 1998 of a Directorate of Ethics and Integrity within the president's office, with its head (Ms. Matembe) enjoying cabinet rank, to coordinate all anti-corruption efforts. There also are a variety of other monitoring, auditing and inspection bodies, and the government is considering an extension of its existing "leadership code" to oblige the spouses and other family members of high-level officials to declare their assets in order to make it harder to hide illicitly acquired wealth. Finally, she added, since "the private sector also is corrupt," the government is working with professional bodies to strengthen ethical codes of conduct for businesses and non-governmental organizations.

Some African countries have been discussing the possibility of a regional convention against corruption. Europe and Latin America have such conventions, but so far Africa and Asia do not. In 1998, the Southern African Development Community held a regional roundtable on anti-corruption strategies, followed by a second one just a month before the IACC in Durban. In February 1999, representatives of 11 African countries (Benin, Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda) met in Washington under the auspices of the Global Coalition for Africa and adopted a set of principles to combat corruption in Africa. In light of such initiatives, President Mogae of Botswana told *Africa Recovery* that the "atmosphere is conducive" in Africa now for drawing up an anti-corruption convention.

Public watchdogs

Frustration over the frequent ineffectiveness of strictly legalistic approaches broke out during a well-attended Africa regional workshop, as several speakers from both the stage and the floor argued for reversing the "onus of proof" in corruption cases, that is, to presume a defendant guilty until proven innocent. This brought a chorus of protests, with many worrying that it could open the door to rights abuses. Mr. Willie Hofmeyr, a prosecutor heading South Africa's Assets Forfeiture Unit, agreed that a sweeping reversal would be wrong, but suggested it could be considered for purposes of seizing civil servants' unexplained assets, though not for prosecuting them.

Skepticism about the willingness of governments and public officials to police themselves also brought wide agreement on the need for independent watchdog bodies. A number of African countries have or are considering establishing an ombudsman's office. Many of Africa's newly elected parliaments lack the ability or confidence to effectively question the actions of public officials, but an African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption has been formed to help share experiences and devise proposals for how to strengthen parliaments' oversight capacities.

A workshop on political corruption recommended legislation to limit the influence of money in election campaigns and party affairs, while another on the media highlighted the central role of the press in helping expose corruption. Whether in the media, civil service or private business, "whistleblowers" must be protected, many agreed.

Time and again, speakers returned to the indispensable role of civil society organizations in providing backbone to the struggle against corruption. They can draw attention to cases of corruption and put pressure on political leaders to follow through on their commitments. They also can help shape public reactions, emphasized Ms. Maathai, by "empowering citizens through civic education so that they can demand accountable and transparent governance from their governments and local authorities."

Global remedies

Since corruption often crosses national borders, the international community as a whole has an important role to play in combating it, the conference agreed. As the UN Secretary-General put it, "Only a global effort is capable of meeting global challenges."

of Health, South African Broadcasting Corporation and other institutions. In Gauteng province (which includes Johannesburg), some R1 mn was diverted from a subsidy scheme intended to help low-income families build houses.

To counter such trends, South Africa's new democratic constitution explicitly declared the public administration must be accountable, transparent and imbued with "a high standard of professional ethics." It created a number of independent institutions, including the Public Service Commission, with broad powers to investigate, monitor and evaluate the functioning of the civil service. Among other bodies, the Auditor-General's office is assigned to detect any improper usage of state funds. The Special Investigating Unit, established by the president and headed by Judge Willem Heath, has been seen as the most independent and aggressive anti-corruption institution. In a report to parliament in February 1999, Judge Heath said the unit had saved the government more than R500 mn during only the first six months of its work.

The office of the Public Protector, another constitutionally mandated independent body, incorporates the old ombudsman's office, with a mandate to look into any form of "improper conduct" by government employees or other individuals carrying out public functions. Last year, its national office received about 3,000 complaints from the public, while the one fully functioning regional office in the Northwest Province received 4,000. "There is a culture of complaining," Mr. Gary Pienaar, senior investigator with the Public Protector, told *Africa Recovery*. "The whole transformation in this country arose from black people saying, 'enough is enough, we're going to stand up for our rights.'" But because the office is severely under-financed, it has difficulty keeping up with all the complaints.

Public engagement, in fact, is a key element of South Africa's anti-corruption strategy. A National Anti-Corruption Summit held in Cape Town in April 1999 featured not only government and public sector participation, but also strong representation from non-governmental and community organizations, trade unions, churches, business and banking institutions, professional and academic bodies, and the media.

Fighting corruption is especially important for the "poor and marginalized," Ms. Safoora Sadek, Executive Director of the South African NGO Coalition, stressed at the summit. This is because corruption "diverts much-needed resources away from community to personal enrichment. Corruption demoralizes and paralyzes our efforts at transformation, and therefore must be stopped."

The UN itself is involved in a variety of ways, he pointed out. The UN Centre for International Crime Prevention has launched a global programme against corruption which seeks to help countries build their own institutional capacities, and is working out an agreement with South Africa to aid anti-corruption efforts in its justice system. UNDP now devotes about one-third of its funding to governance issues. At the conference, Mr. Malloch Brown announced a joint UNDP-Transparency International "partnership fund for transparency," specifically to help non-governmental organizations involved in "corruption busting."

With numerous other donor institutions now also involved in corruption issues — and sometimes linking development assistance levels to progress in combating graft — some conference participants, including Ms. Maathai, raised concerns that Africa will be saddled with yet more "conditionalities." Mr. Wolfensohn reassured the meeting that the World Bank believed that a successful struggle against corruption could only be waged from within a country. "The Bank and other organizations can help, but the real motive, the real engine, has to come from inside."

Beyond welcoming external assistance for national anti-corruption efforts, many delegates from Africa and other developing regions emphasized that industrialized countries must do more to clean up their own act, to prevent their officials and private sectors from exporting corruption to the South. So far, noted President Mogae, Northern governments have failed to take "stern action" against their own nationals involved in foreign bribery. "The corrupter and the corrupted must all face the due process of the law," he affirmed.

There was wide appreciation for the enactment by the industrialized countries' Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) of a convention outlawing the bribery of foreign public officials. The convention, which came into effect in 1999, seeks to close some of the legal loopholes in OECD countries which had permitted foreign bribery, and in some cases even allowed the cost of bribes to be deducted from corporate taxes. Mr. Mark Pieth, chair of the OECD's Working Group on Bribery, said the convention aims to tackle the "supply side" of corruption, thereby contributing more generally to fair trading practices and good governance.

Numerous delegates suggested further action: that public tendering and procurement procedures be made more transparent, that corporations not only stop paying bribes but expose government officials who ask for them, and that the names of multinational corporations that continue to bribe be widely publicized.

Mr. Roger Batty, deputy head of Botswana's Directorate on Corruption, urged better sharing of information and other forms of cooperation by law enforcement agencies in the North, pointing out that it is now often very difficult to investigate corruption cases with international links. Repeatedly, delegates criticized bank secrecy laws in the North which make it very difficult to locate — and recover — the vast sums that have been stashed abroad by corrupt officials. Recent investigations of Swiss and US banks have revealed that billions of dollars in illicit funds from Russia, Mexico, Nigeria and other countries are sitting in those banks' "private" accounts.

The final Durban Commitment called very strongly for international curbs on money-laundering and steps to facilitate the return of looted funds. "We find it wholly unacceptable that the moneys should be invested in institutions in the developed world for the benefit of a corrupt few when they are desperately needed by their rightful owners in the South for the benefit of all," the Commitment said.

The Commitment also supported cancellation of the external debt of poor countries, as advocated by the Jubilee 2000 international anti-debt coalition, coupled with mechanisms to eliminate high-level corruption so that the benefits of debt cancellation "flow to the poor and not to corrupt elites." ■

An international movement

From its establishment in 1993, the prime focus of Transparency International (TI) has been to stimulate anti-corruption initiatives worldwide. Although initially greeted with suspicion, the non-governmental organization (NGO) has since helped bring the rather sensitive issue squarely onto the international development agenda. The group's annual Corruption Perception Index — which ranks countries around the world according to how corrupt they are perceived to be — is now widely reported in the media. TI itself has grown into a real international movement, with a secretariat in Berlin and 77 national chapters across the globe.

Peter Eigen

Of those chapters, 17 are on the African continent. Some of the African chapters, however, have been formed only recently and others are not very strong, TI Chairman Peter Eigen conceded in an interview with *Africa Recovery* just after the close of the International Anti-Corruption Conference. One reason for the weakness of some chapters is actually a reflection of broader political progress, as leading figures "are elected into parliament or they become president," Mr. Eigen noted. That happened, for instance, with Botswana's President Festus Mogae and Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, a founder of TI and previously chairman of its international advisory council.

Mr. Eigen recalled that his own focus on corruption began in Africa, when he was a World Bank director based in Nairobi, Kenya. But because raising the problem of corruption was then still "out of bounds" within the Bank, he resigned in 1991 and, with several others, later launched TI. World Bank President James Wolfensohn, at the Durban conference, acknowledged TI's role in helping provoke open discussion of corruption, the "c" word as it was once known within the Bank.

Aside from supporting the national chapters — which function as autonomous NGOs, "not satellites" of the international body — the Berlin-based secretariat directs much of its attention toward donor governments and multinational corporations. "Many major actors in the international market are deeply involved in corruption," he says. TI tries to "build bridges" for multinational corporations interested in abandoning corrupt practices. To provide further pressure, it released its first Bribe Payers Index in October, to highlight those countries whose corporations are most active in foreign bribery (see the TI website: <www.transparency.de>).

There has been progress among some corporations — scores have toughened their stance on bribery and some actively contribute to TI activities — as well as among donor institutions and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. But the World Trade Organization, Mr. Eigen adds, "is still not interested in the whole subject, even though its main mandate is to keep trade free and open, and grand corruption is a trade restriction, no doubt about it, a tariff barrier to free trade."

Panos

Recent trends that present information and communications technology as "cure all" tools and pressure from various vendors have led to overemphasis on acquiring the technology with little or no attention to information content and management in Africa. Africa has seen hundreds of information technology projects that are synonymous to pipes without water. The focus on technology, not information, and emphasis on tools, not people, will continue to have drastic consequences for organizational development. The future success factor of organizations, nations and individuals is not high-level technology, but rather innovative and well-managed content. Thus it is important to continue to focus on information management, its collection in digital format and qualitative processing and dissemination.

— UN Economic Commission for Africa

Harnessing information technology for development

"The challenge to Africa of globalization and the information age" was the theme of the first African Development Forum in Addis Ababa on 24-28 October by the UN Economic Commission for Africa. It tied neatly together some core issues of the UN Special Initiative on Africa. This report covers aspects of the main debates and discussions (pages 14-16), the state of Africa's communication networks and how countries can plan their expansion (pages 17-20), and interviews with a range of participants (pages 21-27).

By Nii K. Bentsi-Enchill, Assumpta Acam-Oturu, George Koomson and Lorna Davidson

Cool heads and new technology

First African Development Forum tackles continent's telecommunication issues

By ***Nii K. Bentsi-Enchill*** *in Addis Ababa*

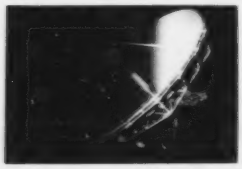
With eloquent brush strokes, Mali's President Alpha Oumar Konaré captured essential themes of the conference: "As an African, I am keeping a cool head — a computer can cost eight years' salary or send 20 children to school.... If we don't have our own clear vision on information and communication technology, we will be disappointed.... Liberalization of communications is an irreversible process and local radio is working wonders since being freed from state control.... Young people are the soldiers who will drive us forward with new technology.... We must not fall into the trap of separating our cultural renaissance from economic development. Globalization is inevitable but we have to enter it while being true to ourselves."

He was speaking at the end of the African Development Forum, conceived by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) as the first of an annual series in which Africa will set a definitive agenda for the next millennium. The theme for 2000 is HIV/AIDS. In 1999, it was the challenge of globalization and the information age, themes that fit in the framework of the UN Special Initiative on Africa. Launched in 1996 by the UN system to help accelerate the pace of African development, the initiative has a specific component on harnessing information technology for development and considers improved telecommunications a positive factor in development, not a result.

Executive Secretary K.Y. Amoako (right) at the launch of ECA's new Technology Centre for Africa, with its coordinator, Ms. Hyeun-Suk Rhee (left).

Participants ranged from community activists and technical experts to national and international policy makers and private entrepreneurs. There were flights of optimism: information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer African countries the "opportunity to leapfrog the industrialized stage and transform their economies into high value-added information economies that can compete with the advanced economies on the global market," one speaker said.

People also came down to earth. How can we talk about joining the information age when agriculture, Africa's economic foundation, is in trouble? "The credit system has collapsed, extension services are collapsing and the credit-transportation-marketing nexus has been broken," a participant said. Over 60 per cent of ICT projects "result in some degree of failure," a conference theme paper added, noting that current "supply-driven pressures" will increase as new technology makes equipment obsolete.* Africa must become neither an experimental laboratory nor a dumping ground, the paper declared.



Africa needs vision, says Mali's President Alpha Oumar Konaré.

ECA Executive Secretary K.Y. Amoako outlined the challenges ahead. There will be over a billion Africans in 2010, he noted, almost double the population when the African Information Society Initiative was launched in 1996 (see page 20). In endorsing this policy framework for the deployment of ICTs in Africa's development, African countries stated that by 2010, every woman, man, child, village and public and private sector office should have secure access to information and knowledge through computers and communication media. Achieving the goal of "equity of access to ICTs" for women, young people and the disabled as well as for rural and marginal urban communities will require partnerships within African countries and between them. It will also require partnerships with the local and foreign private sector, Mr. Amoako stated.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi inserted a key nuance. Africa has no choice "but to do whatever it takes to ensure" a vibrant domestic private sector. Without local enthusiasm and confidence, foreign investment is unlikely. However, weak and "failing states" cannot be considered growth-friendly. "Robust states" can — and need to — be both legitimate and democratic. Liberalization and macroeconomic stability "are normally taken as an end in themselves" but produce "neither meaningful growth and transformation nor sustained liberalization and macroeconomic stability." Enhancing the capacity of the state "must be considered one of [Africa's] critical challenges," he concluded.

"What will the private sector do to improve rural access to telecommunications?" one person asked representatives of the Global Information Infrastructure Commission (GIIC). This international coalition of big firms involved in all aspects of telecommunications from hardware to broadcasting recently set up a GIIC-Africa chapter. "Rural access is not our primary concern," replied a spokesman, adding that access is very important and will come with greater competition.

Many participants called for faster privatization and liberalization. Describing government monopolies on telecommunications services as a "stranglehold on development," one speaker observed that people are waiting months or years to get e-mail

**Information and Communication Technologies for Improved Governance in Africa*, ECA, 1999.

connections. The International Telecommunication Union estimates that providing five telephone lines per 100 Africans will cost $50 bn. "This by far exceeds public sector financing capacity, making large-scale private investment a necessity" and governments will find it increasingly hard to maintain their monopoly on ICTs, another conference theme paper argued.*

Still, equity issues retained their prominence. UN Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette stated a simple truth. Even if ICTs are installed and accessible, "without literacy and basic skills they will remain as remote as they are now." There is a "clear link between the development of basic skills and tremendous gains on the part of the previously dispossessed," she told a plenary session.

In smaller sessions, participants explored all these issues. Youth delegates from several countries insisted that they should be educated, empowered and involved in all aspects of ICT development. Their importance is underlined by Africa's age structure: while AIDS is cutting down adults, some 45 per cent of Africans are under 15 years old; the rest of the world's average is 30 per cent. The infrastructure group called for strategic choices on how and when — and not whether — to privatize and liberalize telecommunications. It said governments should establish independent regulatory bodies before liberalization so that negotiations with investors are effective and result in appropriate choices of technology. Speakers called for harmonization of national rules to attract more capital and facilitate initiatives such as the Regional African Satellite Communications Organization (RASCOM).

Set up in 1992, RASCOM links 42 countries in a satellite-based project to reach rural areas. The project aims, among other things, to install 456,000 solar-powered relay stations, increase rural phone lines to 1 per 100 people, reduce average distances to a phone from 50 to 5 kilometres and provide direct connections between African countries. In August 1999, RASCOM's board of directors awarded France's Alcatel the contract to finance, design, build, launch and operate the dedicated satellite system for an agreed period before transfer. RASCOM has some 20 per cent equity in the enterprise but no voting rights.

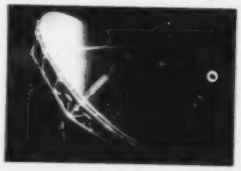
ICTs exist within a context of social inequality, noted the focus group on gender. Already disadvantaged in access to education, credit and land, women are also marginalized in all areas of ICTs. They should take part in all ICT decision-making processes, participants said, calling for more education for girls, particularly in the scientific and technical fields. They added that women entrepreneurs, especially in the informal sector, need products, services and training so they can conduct electronic commerce and gain access to business opportunities without numerous intermediaries.

Participants shared experiences of telecentres, which are a pioneering method of expanding rural access to telephones, computers and the Internet. Recurrent themes included the shortage of managerial and accounting skills among telecentre operators and sustainability— many telecentres are externally financed.

Given these and related problems such as language, content and network reach, telecentres are not the singular solution to rural access, says Ms. Kate Wild of the Canadian International Development Research Centre, who coordinated the conference. Clinics, post offices and schools can also host such services for communities and electronic links between schools have been growing faster than telecentres in some countries. This is partly because the educa-

Networking in the conference centre

Chris Maina/IPS



Globalization and the Information Economy: Challenges and Opportunities for Africa, ECA, 1999. Both publications are on the ECA website: <www.un.org/Depts/eca.adf>

Forward steps at the African Development Forum

The following initiatives were among those launched during the conference:

Schoolnet Africa: A working group is planning to connect schools across the continent to the Internet and focus on HIV/AIDS, youth livelihoods, peace building and cultural preservation.

African Distance Learning Programme: Delegates from Egypt, South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia are planning joint work on digital systems design, content design, networking, training and support.

Beijing+5 Women's Networking Activities: This forum will discuss the impact of information and communications technology (ICT) on African women.

NGONet Africa: Over 40 organizations will set up a network, build capacity for policy analysis, using ICTs for development.

Telecentre Network: People from six African countries will start building a network of telecentre operators. They and others will develop an operations manual and computer recycling strategies, identify electronic commerce opportunities at community level, improve services for disabled people and share evaluation methods and outcomes.

Diaspora Database: Listing groups already working for Africa's development.

tion system provides a ready basis for electronic networking and also because concrete education initiatives are attractive to private sector and donor partners, she observes.

One example is the African Virtual University (AVU). This World Bank-funded initiative is helping to "alleviate the decay" of Africa's universities, many of which face dwindling budgets and declining academic standards, said University of Zimbabwe lecturer Stanley Moyo. Since 1997, the AVU has hooked up with 22 institutions in 16 countries and eight more in francophone and lusophone countries are joining. It offers credits in courses such as calculus and engineering as well as non-credit lectures. Some 2,000 hours of classes have been broadcast live by satellite and this year, over 600 students have taken computer science lectures. More of the course materials will eventually come from within Africa.

African universities need information technology to survive, said Professor Olalere Ajayi of Nigeria's Obafemi Awolowo University, noting that hardware costs are halved when students learn to assemble computers. Such institutions can also become Internet service providers, added Prof. J. Mwenechanya. With funding from the World Bank and the Netherlands, the University of Zambia linked all campus buildings in a fibre optic network, obtained unlimited Internet access and set up Zamnet as a commercial Internet service provider.

The conference purposefully placed such areas of progress in the broader context of governance and access issues. How do you bring government to the people in Nigeria, which has 36 states and 770 local governments? When allocating scarce resources, all governments must be smart, a conference theme paper observed. Installing computers, software and support in government offices can cost $10,000 per employee per year and the costs of training, support and operation of technology investments may be five times the purchase price of equipment, participants learned. Yet, governments and other organizations often spend much more on procurement than on skills development, he said.

Antonio Fiorente

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (right) and UN Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette touring exhibits at the African Development Forum

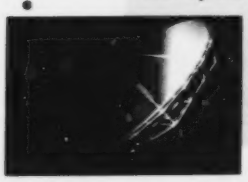
Participants did not doubt the benefits that ICTs can bring when properly employed. In Morocco, better coordination between the finance and planning ministries — and computerization — is said to have halved, since 1989, the time it takes to prepare the national budget. ECA offered some specific guidelines for ICT use in governance that seem more broadly applicable. It said the first step is to ignore ICTs altogether. Then, select priority areas for improvement, establish strategic goals and set up sign posts to guide planned activities towards goals. The second step is to review alternative ICT solutions that support planned activities, taking account of financing, infrastructure, literacy and skills constraints; then analyze the (capital and recurrent) costs and benefits of each solution. After agreeing on an ICT solution, develop a work plan for acquiring and allocating resources and providing training while staying focused on strategic goals and user constraints. Last, begin monitoring and evaluation during the design phase and do not stop. ■

Connecting with the African diaspora

By ***Lorna Davidson****

All Africans should come together and "turn the resource drain into resource gain," participants agreed during a panel discussion on the African diaspora. African expatriates and people of African descent are a vast and neglected resource that Africa should mobilize for its development. New technology has made it easier for Africa to benefit from the knowledge, skills and investment capital of Africans abroad, participants concluded.

Africans in the diaspora still depend on the home continent for identity. They share the hurt caused by political conflict and war and by the continent's weak bargaining position in institutions such as the World Trade Organization, speakers emphasized. Others suggested that think-tanks in the diaspora could support Africa's efforts to improve its trade situation by lobbying, preparing position papers and monitoring specific trade provisions that work against Africa's interests.



Given the continent's need to diversify its trade partners, participants noted that African exporters should target companies and communities in the diaspora in order to penetrate new markets overseas. As was pointed out in another panel discussion on electronic commerce, not only are there many potential investors among Africans abroad but the whole diaspora is also a big market with great purchasing power and high demand for African products. There are skilled people who can contribute physically and electronically to teacher training, distance learning and other educational and health programmes in Africa. They can help develop the electronic networks of non-governmental organizations. Distance is now no obstacle to mobilizing the resources of the diaspora and participants agreed to compile a database of active diaspora groups.

* *English Editor, Information and Communication Team, ECA.*

Building blocks for communications

Africa needs better infrastructure to increase demand and lower costs, says ECA

Sub-Saharan Africa currently has the least developed communications network in the world. With almost 12 per cent of the world's population, the region has only 0.5 per cent of all telephone lines (about 3 mn lines, South Africa excluded). Compounding the chronic shortage of lines, few people can afford to own a telephone, says the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

There is a vicious circle. Most Africans live in rural areas; the greater the distance to the capital, the fewer the telephone lines. It is cheaper to install a line and own a phone on a large network than on a small network. It requires substantial investment to expand the network and lower costs by reaching more people. Most African countries are neither able to make the required investment themselves nor attract foreign capital in sufficient quantity to expand the network faster. The usual reason is the limited market for phone services when most people live in low-income rural areas that do not generate enough revenue to be profitable.

The cost of a phone connection in Africa's mostly low-income countries was almost 20 per cent of the continent's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in 1995, compared with 1 per cent in high-income countries. Even in urban areas, the high cost of access is a major reason why telephone networks are defective, ECA says in *Policies and Strategies for Accelerating Africa's Information Infrastructure Development*, a paper prepared for the African Development Forum.

In 1996, business phones in Africa cost an average $112 to install — over $200 in Benin, Mauritania, Nigeria and Togo — and $6 a month to rent, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Renting a line cost between $0.80 and $20 a month, and calls cost from $0.60 to over $5 an hour. Since then, the cost of local calls has risen to over $8 an hour in Uganda, Gabon and Chad.

Given the high cost of private phones, Africa needs many more public telephones. As an intermediate step in Cameroon, private "phone shops" are springing up. Senegal has over 7,000 such "telecentres," employing over 10,000 people and generating nearly a third of all phone revenues. Most telecentres are in urban areas but are also appearing across the country. This expansion will continue as current work on linking 2,000 villages and towns by fibre optic cable reaches completion.

However, policy objectives in African countries vary between achieving universal service and providing affordable universal access. The first aims, in principle, for "a phone in each home"; the second involves widespread provision of public facilities at reasonable cost. South Africa's target is nationwide access to telephones within a 30-minute walk. The Gambia wants to put phones in all villages of 2,000 people or more, as does Botswana

No phone, no computer for most Africans

- Africa has some 14 mn telephone lines, or fewer than 2 per 100 people. Excluding South Africa, sub-Saharan Africa has fewer than 0.52 lines per 100 people.
- Over 50 per cent of the lines are in urban areas. Over 70 per cent of the population is rural.
- There is roughly 1 public telephone per 17,000 people. The world ratio is 1 per 600 people, and in high-income countries, 1 per 200.
- Average annual growth of lines is about 10 per cent. Over a million people are on waiting lists for a phone.
- Sahelian and Central African countries such as Niger and Zaire have fewer than 2 lines per 1,000 people.
- North and South Africa have about 35 lines per 1,000 people.
- West and East African coastal countries have between 2.5 and 10 lines per 1,000 people.
- Besides North and South Africa, only Botswana, Cape Verde, Gabon, Mauritius and Swaziland have over 1 line per 50 people.
- Most calls between African countries are still routed through Europe or the US; this costs African countries some $400 mn a year in transit fees.
- Of Africa's roughly 1 million Internet users, 90 per cent are in South Africa.
- Internet service providers are concentrated in capital cities; reaching the Internet from elsewhere usually means an expensive long-distance call.
- Average costs of an Internet account for five hours a month are $60 (telephone line rental excluded). In countries with per capita incomes 10 times higher than the African average, costs of five hours of similar Internet access range from a high of $18.50 (Germany) to a low of $7.25 (US).
- There are fewer than 3 computers per 1,000 people; 1 person in 1,500 has access to the Internet; the world average is about 1 in 40.
- Nearly 80 per cent of all websites are in English; only 10 per cent of the world's population speak English.
- Africa generates some 0.4 per cent of the contents of the World Wide Web and only 0.02 per cent when South Africa is excluded.
- Over 60 per cent of Africans can be reached through existing radio broadcasting networks.

Telephone and cellular networks in Africa — 1997

Sub-regions	Population ('000s)	Main lines per 100 people	Cell customers per 100 people
North Africa*	164,400	4.47	0.06
West Africa	220,690	0.44	0.04
Central Africa	28,458	0.53	0.05
East Africa	236,902	0.31	0.02
Southern Africa	110,202	4.66	0.94
Southern Africa (excl. S. Africa)	68,106	1.29	0.11
Total Africa	**760,652**	**1.89**	**0.17**
Sub-Saharan Afr.	626,542	1.14	0.19
Sub-Saharan Afr. (excl. S. Africa)	584,446	0.50	0.4

**Includes Mauritania and Sudan* *Source:* ECA

for villages with at least 500 people.

To finance this expansion of the network in rural areas, Mauritius, South Africa and Uganda have a Universal Service Fund into which phone companies pay a portion of their revenues (0.16 per cent in South Africa). Morocco uses operator license fees to finance rural telecommunications projects.

Other countries have given their phone companies broad universal service obligations without defining specific targets and policy makers need to think about their goals. This is increasingly important as phone services can now deliver the Internet. Yet, South Africa's Telkom is installing wireless infrastructure in rural areas that cannot provide acceptable speeds for Internet connection.

These days, greater access to more extensive communications networks is seen as a prerequisite for development and not an outcome. It is also expensive — the ITU says it would cost $6-8 bn for 4.5 mn new lines in Africa. But as "cash cows" for governments, state-owned companies are seldom free to invest their profits in extending their services. Revenue from privatization and license fees also tends to disappear into government coffers instead of network expansion.

Worse still, government offices usually incur the biggest communications bills but do not pay on time. An ITU study of 10 sub-Saharan countries found that on average, only 60 per cent of bills get paid and, in most cases, governments are the largest debtors.

Deregulation not a simple answer

Ever-bigger private firms are battling for dominance in thriving national and international telecommunications markets, replacing public monopolies. Several African countries have also embarked on privatization and other measures leading to full competition, but so far most have sold the state monopoly in basic phone services to a single private company or consortium (see box).

Only Ghana, Madagascar, South Africa and Uganda have introduced competition in the national network while Mozambique, Nigeria and Sudan have issued licenses for limited competition in some parts of the country. In Ghana, a consortium led by the US-based Western Wireless bought a license guaranteeing a five-year share of the fixed-line market in which the only competitor is the former state monopoly. It can also provide mobile phone services for the next 20 years. Only a handful of countries have committed themselves to the World Trade Organization target of full competition in basic services by 2005.

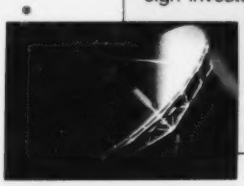
With fixed lines in short supply, mobile phone services have grown rapidly in 42 African countries, mainly in capital cities. They now comprise about a fifth of all phones in Africa, excluding South Africa. However, using a cell phone costs over $0.50 a minute on average and very few people can afford extensive use.

These are some of the elements that African policy makers must take into account as they develop strategies for liberalizing and extending telecommunications. New technology is gradually lowering the cost of expanding networks and owning or using a grow-

Privatization under way in Africa's telecommunications

At least 17 countries have fully or partially privatized their national telecommunications company, usually after separating the postal function. Foreign investors often come from the former colonial metropolis — Portugal Telecom in Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Principé; and France Télécom in Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and Senegal. One exception is Telekom Malaysia, which has invested in South Africa, Guinea and Ghana.

Usually offered guaranteed monopolies for 5-10 years, foreign investors have paid relatively high prices for their equity. European telecommunications firms are typically valued at $1,000 to $1,500 per phone line, but for its investment in Senegal's Sonatel, France Télécom paid nearly $5,000 per line.



Other options for raising capital and improving national phone services include:

- Offering shares to employees, financial institutions and the public.
- Revenue sharing through build-operate-transfer (BOT) in which the government contracts an investor to install and operate the service for a share in profits in the initial period.
- Management contracts with (usually) foreign private sector firms, without transfer of ownership (for example, Cable and Wireless' contracts with Botswana and Sudan).
- Joint ventures in a limited area of service, such as cellular networks and Internet service provision (Madagascar).
- Sale of bonds to people on the waiting list for a telephone.
- Sub-regional collaboration for greater economies of scale.

ing range of services. Fibre optic cables and wireless and satellite facilities can make rural areas much easier to reach. As in other sectors, careful regulation of more competition may facilitate infrastructure development. But a country must have a plan.

Regional collaboration

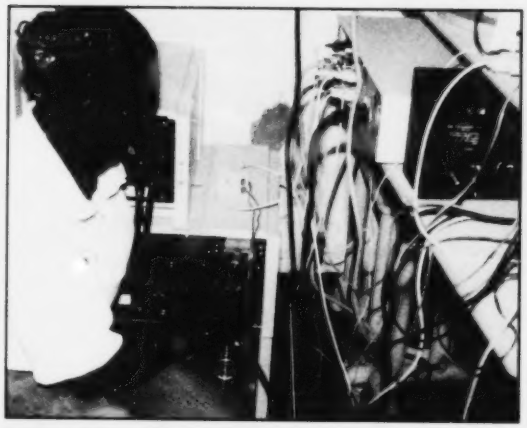
With a view to increasing the economies of scale needed to attract private investment, nearly half the 14-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) has adopted a legally binding protocol on communications. SADC has also set up the Telecommunication Regulators of Southern Africa (TRASA) forum to share ideas and experiences.

At regional level, Africans ministers adopted the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) at an ECA conference in 1996. Combined with the Abidjan African Regional Telecommunications Development Conference held the same year, AISI has created significant pressure for appropriate regulatory, tariff and service provision policies.

In 1998, over 40 countries endorsed "the African Connection," an initiative which calls for the installation of 50 mn telephone lines in Africa over the next five years. This is now a project of the Nairobi-based Pan-African Telecommunication Union (PATU).

Meanwhile African countries have two basic problems to overcome. The first is the lack of coordination between key ministries such as finance, planning, trade and telecommunications. The second is the insufficient collaboration between anglophone and francophone countries that weakens Africa's position in global forums and hampers sub-regional and regional activities. ■

Computers are few, the issues many



People need training in all aspects of computer technology.

Computers in Africa are relatively few — recent estimates are 1-3 computers per 1,000 people, with the ratio peaking near 20 per 1,000 in Botswana, Mauritius and South Africa. They are also relatively expensive. There is little local assembly, they are taxed as luxury imports in many countries and retailers make sure of their own margins. The notable exceptions are Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. Import taxes there are under 10 per cent but communications equipment and computer peripherals are still charged at higher rates. In 1995, only five African countries could connect to the Internet. By early 1999, only the Republic of Congo, Eritrea and Somalia could not. Still, Internet use remains prohibitively expensive.

Most Internet service providers (ISPs) are in urban centres where local call charges are often too high for most people. Outside the towns, it takes an expensive, long-distance call to reach an ISP. So far, only 13 countries have tackled this problem by allowing phone companies to set up a special "area code" for Internet access, charged at local call rates.

Meanwhile, ISP charges range from $10 to $100 a month. Internet access is generally cheaper in countries with several ISPs such as Uganda, which has at least eight. State-owned telecommunications companies now provide Internet services in 31 countries, controlling the international "gateway." Where the national company competes with the private sector — Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia — Internet access costs are lower.

The cheapest Internet access for ISPs in countries outside South Africa is through two-way, satellite-based services using very small aperture terminals (VSAT) to connect directly to the US or Europe. This has been quickly adopted wherever regulations allow, namely Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Most of Africa's Internet connections are to the US, with a few to the UK and France. The exceptions are some ISPs in Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland that use South Africa as a hub. Aside from a link between Mauritius and Madagascar, there are no Internet links between neighbouring countries in Africa. High international tariffs discourage ISPs from setting up multiple international links. ISPs must therefore put all their traffic on a single, high-cost international circuit.

The result is a growing burden of payments to US or European service providers for Internet traffic between African countries. Africans are trying to raise the issue in international meetings, and could collaborate with Asian telecommunications operators and regulators who oppose the same imbalance in Asia.

Africa has so far been marginal in global policy making on Internet issues. African ISPs took a step forward in 1998 when they began setting up a regional body (AfriNIC) to take over management of some African Internet governance matters from the US and Europe. ■

Africa defines its electronic agenda

Several countries are working on their information infrastructure; more will follow

In Africa today, there are roughly a thousand externally funded projects involving related aspects of telecommunication, audio-visual and computer technology, one expert estimates. To bring some coherence to this situation and assert their own development priorities, 22 African countries* are at different stages of devising policies and implementation plans for national information and communications infrastructure (NICI). The aim is to use new technology to accelerate progress at national and sectoral level.

NICI plans are a key part of the African Information Society Initiative which African ministers adopted in 1996. In doing so, they committed their governments to initiating a process that requires active private sector and civil society participation. NICI planning involves the legal framework, the physical infrastructure and the equipment used to store, process, transmit or display data as text, voice and image. More importantly, the process involves consulting a wide range of people on their needs, in the public and private sectors, civil society organizations, as well as students and the general public.

Antonio Fiorente

ECA conference: appropriate plans for infrastructure depend on broad consultation.

Several sponsors are pushing the NICI process forward, starting with African governments. Their partners include the Carnegie Corporation of New York, ECA, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada, the UN Development Programme, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the US Agency for International Development and the World Bank.

Ten countries began working with ECA on developing NICI plans in 1997: Burundi, Ethiopia, Mali, Malawi, Morocco, Namibia, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Tunisia. The other 12 come in two groups. Of the other 12, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda have worked, also since 1997, with the IDRC's Acacia programme, which focuses on community development. The remainder — Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania and Nigeria — started their NICI process only last July, with IDRC assistance.

* *Status reports on the whole continent are available in* African Country Profiles: National Information and Communication Infrastructure, *on the ECA website* <*www.un.org/Depts/eca/adf*>.

Elements common to the NICI process in different countries include needs assessment, raising awareness, preparation of plans, policy coordination and programme implementation. Other recurring issues include gender and youth, community participation, research and training.

ECA says the following major "stakeholders" should play an active role in developing NICI policy: the government and parastatal companies, national and international private firms, regulatory bodies, state and private telecommunications firms, civil society organizations, academia, research centres and information technology experts, and international and regional organizations.

Countries should set up a NICI development team of experts from different relevant sectors to consult these "stakeholders," ECA says. Among its duties, the team starts with the sectoral priorities of the country's development plan, then compiles the needs, priorities and aspirations of the "stakeholders" as related to information and communication technology (ICT). Then it assesses ICT projects in the country and evaluates the national status of ICT in four areas. One is policy, covering such issues as regulation, gender and equity, environment, and the role of the private sector. Another is infrastructure, including physical and electronic equipment, facilities and services. The third area is "infostructure," tackling issues of content (databases, websites) and applications (to make the technologies more accessible to all, including the illiterate). Last, and perhaps the most important, is training and research. The NICI process moves towards completion with a strategy for short-, medium- and long-term implementation that also defines the responsibilities of the "stakeholders" and the partnerships needed.

According to ECA, the NICI process challenges African governments to develop "clear vision and leadership" in applying new technologies to development priorities and to promote the required organizational change. The private sector must in turn be innovative, while civil society has to make sure that NICI plans meet the needs of "disenfranchised groups." ■

For Africa to jump, it will need legs

INTERVIEW

ECA Deputy Executive Secretary Lalla Ben Barka says that African governments, institutions and civil society will bear responsibility for how effectively the new information technologies are used

UN Photo by Evan Schneider

On national planning capacity

Such capacity is very low in many countries. The issue is one of political will. Even if the weak private sector manages to acquire information and communication technologies (ICTs), the enabling environment still depends on governments that must also develop human resources. There are many problems ahead for planning and implementation, but ECA is ready to help any country or sub-region.

On ICTs and basic rural needs

Conference participants continually warned that ICTs must reach the majority of Africa's population, which is 70-75 per cent rural. Even with rapid urbanization, you find the densely populated city outskirts full of rural people trapped on the edge of "modernity."

We talk about sophisticated technology when we don't have electricity in our villages. Since there is a risk of further rural marginalization, we have to be imaginative. In the 1970s, we talked about literacy centres in villages. Now, we will increasingly focus on telecentres. They can be a source of important and useful information.

Governments obviously have a role to play. But as with literacy, health and agricultural extension services, the problem has always been an approach that imposes "knowledge" from the outside. Extension workers must come only as facilitators. Rural people must express their own needs, and gradually meet these needs by themselves.

On African content on the Internet

I believe strongly in gathering and analyzing traditional knowledge so we can better integrate knowledge from elsewhere in our development. We have made mistakes by accepting undigested information and knowledge from outside. We must produce our own knowledge, or more of it. I did a lot of literacy work 20 years ago and I remember extraordinary discussions with rural people on a vast range of topics. We continue to neglect an incredible amount of knowledge. We must preserve this knowledge, or it will be too late. People with certain types of knowledge are no longer passing it on and the new generations are losing their roots.

I asked one panel during ADF '99: how many countries have a clear idea of what they want to be in 10, 20 or 50 years' time? If we don't have our own vision, if we don't produce our own content, we will remain poor consumers, submerged in badly digested information from outside. We must avoid this in the new millennium.

On a cautionary note

ICTs are already very fashionable but they are also a necessity. We must make sure that in a few years' time, we don't find ourselves swamped with equipment we have not maintained or even used, but left to pile up in cupboards. Forty years after independence, we have been through some fads. We risk doing the same with ICTs.

The potential is there for us to leapfrog several stages. Where other parts of the world have taken decades to get to a certain stage, Africa can get there quickly because we can access very detailed and very broad information. But we must prepare ourselves to make use of new technology. The responsibility is ours alone, through our institutions, governments and civil society organizations.

Putting computers in rural schools when there is no electricity, a shortage of trained teachers and little or no African content is a wasted investment. So let's proceed in stages.

— Lalla Ben Barka

When you jump a stage, you must know what you have jumped over. There are some stages we must not jump and this requires analysis and decisions on the pace at which we go forward. We will not be another South Korea, which was at a similar level of development with African countries 30 years ago. It has done some leapfrogging, but it made sure of its material, institutional and human resources. I fear that African countries may not take the time to do this.

On 'free offers'

When I worked on a 10-year education plan in Mali, we had lots of offers from donors telling us about computers in primary classrooms all over the world. We said thank you very much; we realize the enormous potential gain but we must be ready. Putting computers in rural schools when there is no electricity, a shortage of trained teachers and little or no African content is a wasted investment. So let's proceed in stages. The African market is wide open, and patrons are making us "free offers" we are not ready to absorb. We need to be ready so that if we jump some stages, we will still have legs to walk on. ■

Mastering the tools of technology

N. K. Berta-Enchill

A country's development plan must be the starting point for information and communication strategies, says Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, Director of the Division of Information Services for Development at the Economic Commission for Africa

INTERVIEW

Africa's decision makers must "integrate the technological dimension" in national plans for economic growth and human development and the process "should not be directed by technocrats." To this end, ECA advocates drawing in disadvantaged communities, incorporates gender issues and gets the youth fully involved "through the broadest possible national consultation," says Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane.

Some countries are "very much behind on their development agenda," and that is precisely why ECA believes the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help accelerate the process. Through telemedicine, for example, "you can inform one community about the cholera epidemic in another village 10 kilometres away and advise them on precautionary measures." ICTs "will not solve Africa's basic problems but can contribute to improvements in health care, education and commerce."

More openness to dialogue

Asked if the interests of ordinary people are adequately represented in policy making on ICTs, she observes that "the level of civil society participation is a national question, and more and more governments are open to dialogue." The continent-wide prominence of gender issues is another sign of the increasing influence of civil society organizations.

On the notion of ICTs helping Africa "leapfrog" stages of development, she acknowledges the "constant debate" about whether development must be linear or in stages. She believes there are "pivotal moments in history when you must make a qualitative and quantitative leap. But let's not fool ourselves; there will be no miracles and ICTs are not a panacea. You have to know what kind of development you want. Then you must be in control of the technology and avoid fashions and new gadgets. You have to know what you expect from technology, or else you risk a big letdown."

She points to illiterate market women "who can work wonders with a calculator," and asks what is being developed for such people. "They do just fine with a calculator because it is not a gadget but a tool integrated in their lives." And without banking networks and infrastructure, electronic commerce is "inconceivable" for rural Africans. But ICTs are adaptable: "You just have to understand information needs in rural areas. In Africa, we share information and there is a culture of communication that predates the new technologies. Put a telecentre in a village and the people will come. All you need is one person who can read. One little kid can translate for the father or grandfather and read messages for the whole village. And the local teacher or medical aide could do an hour or two a week, passing on basic health care information. Nobody is saying that overnight all rural Africans must be gifted in essay writing or translation from English or French into their language."

Information technology is not a panacea. You have to know what kind of development you want. Then you must be in control of the technology, avoiding fashions and gadgets.

— Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane

'You must have a plan'

There is still a lot to do, she says, to improve the institutional and regulatory framework for ICTs and to overcome resistance to deregulation in countries where the experience has fallen short of expectations. "Privatization does not solve all problems. You must have a plan, you must know how to open your market, and what kinds of services you want. Some countries have gone from a state to a private monopoly, which has not been as beneficial as introducing competition. Since telecommunications are often a major source of state revenue, governments should take their time to find and be comfortable with the right balance."

Many government delegations participated enthusiastically at ADF '99 and Ms. Ben Soltane is pleased with the progress made since 1995 when ECA held the African Regional Symposium on Telematics for Development. Only five African countries had Internet connections at the time and some officials said: "No, thank you very much. We hold power by controlling information." She says many officials may still believe that, "but few will dare say that now." She affirms that "if you know how to share information, the more you can disseminate, the stronger you are."

And while it is "fantastic" that 51 African countries are now connected to the Internet, Ms. Ben Soltane says "we have to go beyond this raw figure to find out who has benefited." She wants to move from anecdotal evidence to more scientific study. "We have to define what we want to measure, at micro- and macro-levels, in terms of impact on specific sectors and on categories of people." ■

More African information on the Net

INTERVIEW

Nancy Hafkin, ECA's Chief of Development Information Services Section, believes in the creation, management and dissemination of information so that Africans can find relevant material on the Internet that is generated by Africans

Nick Berry-Ingrid

"It is really quite amazing how much is out there already," says Ms. Nancy Hafkin, pointing to the contents of *Africa on the Internet: An Annotated Guide to African Web Sites*. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has published this 279-page volume as a first attempt at listing all web sites "produced by Africans, hosted in Africa or containing African content." The volume moves from Algeria to Zimbabwe, covering available categories from arts to tourism. Already posted on the ECA website <www.un.org/Depts/eca/adf>, the Guide will be updated, corrected and available also in print and on CD-ROM.

Ms. Hafkin leads the Promoting Information Technology for Development team in ECA's Development Information Services Division. She was already at ECA when it began work in 1979 on a Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS) with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) as "intellectual and financial partners." The aim was to increase access to organized information for development planning. The method was to set up a computerized database at ECA to centralize and disseminate such information, and train specialists to build national databases.

There were successes. PADIS built up a bibliographic database of development information "which is still maintained, and linked to ECA's statistical database." Several hundred Africans were trained in development information management software, and 23 countries have maintained databases for development planning. At its peak in 1994-95, PADIS had 40 national participating centres, "sometimes in universities, or in the information and documentation centres of finance and planning ministries, all using PADIS methodology and producing national publications."

But the concept was well ahead of the technological realities: neither the producers nor the seekers had access to satellite connections for electronic information transfer between national centres and Addis Ababa. So there was initial reliance on photocopies and postal offices. Also, PADIS documents were mainly ECA documents. "It proved impossible to get a copy from every national system of every document they input. You had to write, call, or later, fax your information request; then databases were searched and the [bibliographic] answers were sent back. Then you chose what documents you wanted. Through letters, the process could take three years. Would the people you were writing to still be there? Would they still remember, or care?"

ECA began work with IDRC on computer networking in 1987, the same year PADIS was renamed the Pan-African Development Information System. ECA realized that the Internet could do "in extremely decentralized fashion what we had naively hoped to do in 1979 with a fairly centralized database." ECA continues to help African countries and institutions make their organized information available through the Internet, on CD-ROMs and other electronic tools of communication and networking.

The whole point of the Internet is to become a producer of information, not just a consumer.

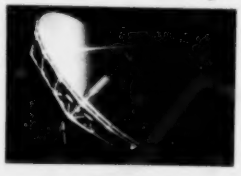
— Nancy Hafkin

Ms Hafkin says people often think "this whole information age is about getting connected. But that only makes you a receiver. The whole point is to become a producer, not just a consumer. That's the message we try to get across in every meeting, seminar and workshop we organize."

She notes that La Francophonie, the French-speakers' international cultural association, is making "very substantial" grants for content development. Worldwide Internet content in French is dwarfed by that in English but in Africa, the francophone contribution "is quite significant. The exciting thing is that it comes from the grassroots, from NGOs, local associations and entrepreneurs, and gender is an important aspect of it."

ECA encourages content development at regional and national level and gets requests for training. But "unless you organize the information in documents and databases, you can't put anything on your website. So we begin with information management and basic website development." ECA also "tries to link governments with local private sector firms that can provide training and support services."

Ms. Hafkin emphasizes that "user needs must always come first. You must think about where you are working, what kind of information you and those you are working with need and try to use the new technologies to satisfy needs without being technology driven." She urges people to think about practical ways to blend together the old and new technologies in order to reach people and help make their knowledge accessible. ■



From community to African unity

Nik K. Barry-Shaw

Governments and non-governmental organizations active in information and communications technology will meet next February at the Bamako 2000 conference in Mali. Among them will be the Dakar-based OSIRIS and its head, Olivier Sagna

INTERVIEW

Africa is already a participant in the information society, at its own rhythm and in its own way. Even though illiteracy is widespread, "sometimes, you see illiterate people among the heaviest users" of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), says Mr. Olivier Sagna, who heads a young, Dakar-based non-governmental organization — the Observatory on Information Systems, Networks and Information Highways (the French acronym is OSIRIS).

Mobile telephones have really caught on in Senegal's informal sector among "illiterate traders who obviously need to communicate." Also, illiterate emigrants began making video recordings to send home some time ago. "Now the family can see the brother or father alive, speaking his own language, without intermediaries." Even if access to ICTs is limited due to cost, language and literacy, "communities are adapting the technology to their needs."

Telecentres can help democratize ICT access. In Senegal, the national telecommunications company (Sonatel) was unable to provide universal public service. It allowed people to set up a telephone service in their homes. Now there are over 10,000 of these "telecentres," even in distant villages. Once there is electricity and a phone line, then there can be a telecentre. Just as 10 or 15 people read one newspaper and people listen to the radio and watch TV in groups, "it's the same with a telephone: neighbours freely give your phone number to others and get calls and messages." This is precisely the "cultural specificity that we must factor into our ICT strategies."

Telecentres should start off small and accessible, in a garage or in somebody's room, so that they maintain community relations and character. "The telecentre operator can dial for you, or translate your e-mail message from French or English. The operator can also find information for you on the Internet."

Mr. Sagna cites language and "the absence of African-generated material about African realities" among the key barriers to greater demand for Internet-related services. Most Internet content is in English, and for francophone African countries, "much of content in French may have little to do with daily realities." He argues that Africans must decide for themselves what they need to have on the Internet. "The risk is that tomorrow, others will come and do market feasibility studies, then go away to develop products that meet our needs. Once again, we will be passive consumers and not producers."

He describes as "an open secret" the foreign private sector push for legal changes in African countries. "They know that rates of return on investment in Africa are the highest in the world. They know that Africa is a big market. They have the advantage of having exploited Internet opportunities before us. They have greater human and financial resources to invest in the sector, and to exert pressure on our governments."

Amidst all this globalization, Africans cannot be active only within national borders. We think that ICTs are a powerful tool for advancing African unity.

— Olivier Sagna

In some countries, local private sector initiatives have run up against the foreign private monopoly that has replaced the state monopoly. In Senegal, Sonatel was privatized and now France Télécom has some 42 per cent in equity and has a legal and practical monopoly in certain service areas "which hampers national private sector development." Mr. Sagna says that with relatively little investment, wireless loops with a VSAT (very small aperture terminal) antenna can serve a community over a 5-10 kilometre radius. "This is being done in a few countries but in Senegal, France Télécom cannot do it and has forbidden others from providing this kind of service. The fact of a monopoly makes ICT costs higher than if there was competition."

For example, there used to be a minimum legal distance between telecentres. Then Sonatel saw their success and lifted the distance rule. All telecentres used to sell a phone unit at CFA 100 francs after buying it from Sonatel at CFA 50 francs. "Now, the price can be as low as 65 francs in some neighbourhoods, there is a proliferation of telecentres, better access and lower costs for consumers due to competition."

OSIRIS raises awareness and encourages debate about the need for an independent regulatory authority in Senegal, Internet security and intellectual property issues. It is a member of ANAIS (the Advisory Network on African Information Strategies), together with similar organizations in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Mali. Their efforts to build a strong and active network will be boosted next February at the Bamako 2000 conference of organizations active in the ICT sector. "Amidst all this globalization, Africans cannot be active only within national borders. We think that ICTs are a powerful tool for advancing African unity." ■

Senegalese traders go electronic

INTERVIEW

Electronic commerce is up and running in Senegal through the electronic network of "trade points" launched by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Trade Point Senegal started up in Dakar in 1996 as a public and private sector joint initiative to facilitate local access to business opportunities on the global Trade Points network.

Linking Senegalese importers and exporters with the foreign public and private sector — customs, banks, insurance companies, transporters — also has the underlying aim of simplifying business rules and procedures for more efficient trade, says marketing manager Ibrahima Diagne.

Results have been "very positive" even though placing new information and communication technologies (ICTs) at the service of mostly illiterate traders was not an obvious recipe for success. So far, over 1,000 business opportunities from Senegal have been advertised on the Trade Points network, half of them getting promising replies. Some 40 Senegalese entrepreneurs have made confirmed deals. The rest were reluctant to provide further information, "perhaps fearing we would tell the tax authorities," Mr. Diagne adds.

Trade Point Senegal has also begun to decentralize, with help from the Acacia Initiative of the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Its offices in Thiès, Joal, Mboro, Ross Béthio, St. Louis and Podor have even recorded better business results for these agricultural and fishing communities than for Dakar in a comparable month of operations.

Since Trade Point Senegal aims to raise awareness of electronic commerce, the fact that traders are seeing the business benefits of using ICTs is a source of satisfaction. And illiteracy is not a real obstacle. Most ordinary people, not just the illiterate, tend to feel excluded from new technology at first. So "we try to demystify the tool. We tell them that behind the telephone, there is some very complicated technology. But we all pick up the phone and dial a number. So understand that the computer is as banal as the phone. We approach people and get them to express their needs. We show them that they can use the technology without necessarily having the skills themselves. With our training programmes, they will eventually learn computer skills themselves. But in this first phase, we help them get results. The key is for traders to see one of their own making some money, then they become enthusiastic. We try to raise awareness in all business sectors — particularly the micro-, small and medium enterprises — about a new tool that can benefit them all."

Trade Point Senegal began working last August with a thousand women in various small businesses in the densely populated Guediawaye area of Dakar. It demonstrated its services to them and got some to pay the annual CFA 2,500 franc registration fee (under $5). Some women sent e-mail messages offering potential deals. "Just two days later, they were astonished to receive some enquiries. So they are now extremely enthusiastic." ■

Multimedia services in Cape Coast

INTERVIEW

Ghana has three community learning centres (CLCs) in Accra, Cape Coast and Kumasi, supported by the US Agency for International Development. The centres try to "demystify" computers and raise awareness, says Ms. Rose Bampo of the Cape Coast CLC.

It has six multimedia computers and offers training in word processing and database programmes, Internet orientation and touch-typing. It also disseminates health education materials from CD-ROMs. Operations began last July with a poster advertising campaign that drew students, mostly doing their project work and a little Internet browsing. Then the phone lines went down for a couple of weeks. But soon enough, more people in the community heard of the facility. The main targets are small-scale entrepreneurs. This involves "quite some work as most of them are uneducated."

The CLC tries to link up women traders with women's groups, and does interpretation for them. With the batik and tie-dye makers who buy their dyes mostly from Accra, "we want to help them take advantage of e-commerce opportunities. They can send e-mail to dye suppliers elsewhere who can supply them in bulk at lower cost."

From July to September, some 200 people came to browse the Web and a similar number used the e-mail services. Women make up only about a third of the clients. Some have husbands abroad and now use e-mail instead of expensive phone calls. With only six computers in the centre, people have to queue for hours. Ms. Bampo invites support from other donors so that some computers can be set aside for more Internet users while other computers are used for training other users. ■

Telemedicine in rural Uganda

Lydia Makumbi

According to Maria Musoke, radio can play a big role in improving basic health and reducing the number of maternal deaths

INTERVIEW

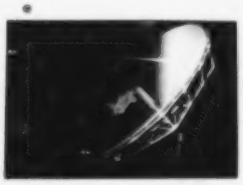
By **George Koomson***

"Africa does not need sophisticated equipment." Ms. Maria Musoke speaks as an information specialist who studied the communications component of a pilot health project last July in eastern Uganda's Iganga district. The project has helped reduce maternal mortality rates by as much as 40 per cent over the past three years. There, intermediate technologies (very high frequency [VHF] radios and walkie-talkies) "worked wonders." She favours a multi-dimensional approach "to respond to different abilities and needs." High-end equipment is fine at district and national level, "but it is impractical to supply Internet facilities to traditional birth attendants who can't read or write."

The project — Rural Extended Services and Care for Ultimate Emergency Relief (RESCUER) — teams up the UN Population Fund, Uganda's Ministry of Health and Population Secretariat and Iganga district authorities. RESCUER is part of the ministry's efforts to reduce Uganda's high maternal mortality rate — about 506 per 100,000 — by improving local care and referral systems. Some 80 per cent of Uganda's 17 million people live in rural areas, fertility rates are high and over 60 per cent of childbirth is handled by traditional midwives, relatives and friends.

The project has three components: communications, transport and provision of quality health services. The communications system uses VHF radios installed in base stations and health units, in the referral hospital ambulance and the District Medical Officer's vehicle, while the birth attendants have walkie-talkies. The midwives and birth attendants got additional training and now there is better quality care. But transport has been the biggest problem as the ambulance sometimes breaks down.

Training has been according to needs, Ms. Musoke says. The birth attendants were taught basics "such as what to do when a woman in labour comes to them panting; or what to do about a retained placenta. The midwives got a refresher course since some have been out of school for 10 years or more. All health workers were trained to use the communication equipment."



On the significant changes the RESCUER project has introduced, Ms. Musoke points first to the fact that health personnel have been able to call and get practical advice even when no vehicle is available. "They had faster responses to situations and felt less isolated." The project has also helped overcome absenteeism, "which used to be a big problem." Now, people are afraid they can be called at any time and calls are heard on the other receivers, including in the chief medical executive's office. "Senior officers are likely to radio to the responsible officer if a call receives no response for about 30 minutes," she adds.

The increased number of births handled by trained personnel, referrals to health units and the reduction in maternal mortality "shows that the RESCUER project has caused a change in the health-seeking behaviour and reproductive outcomes in Iganga district."

The health authorities started the project by raising awareness and providing some training. People also began to see other uses in the project, Ms. Musoke notes. Before RESCUER began, if a refrigerator broke down, "you might have to travel many miles for repairs. But now, with just a radio call, a technician can be sent down to do the job."

Walkie-talkies have been a great source of empowerment for traditional birth attendants, building confidence in the increased number of women they can help.

— Maria Musoke

Communications "made a significant contribution to the success of the project," Ms. Musoke observes. When transport broke down, the presence of a midwife and the communications system played a big role in saving lives: the birth attendants consulted health units, which in turn consulted colleagues and their seniors. The walkie-talkie technology was "a great source of empowerment" for the birth attendants, she adds. It improved their image, built confidence in their clients and helped them attend to more women.

The initial cost of the project was under $124,000, covering the cost of the radio and monitoring equipment and training for technicians and users. After this phase, running costs decreased. According to Ms. Musoke, the system uses solar energy for electricity. "After the initial expenses, there are the usual maintenance costs, but these are small and easy to bear, which means that even when donors pull out, the project will still be sustainable."

Because of its positive results, the RESCUER project is already being replicated in three other districts and there are plans to extend it in phases to 30 more. ■

**Editor of* African Agenda, *an Accra-based bi-monthly magazine published by the Third World Network Africa Secretariat.*

Software by Africans for Africa

INTERVIEW

Change attitudes, adopt the right strategies, apply will power and the continent will move forward, says Venancio Massingue of Mozambique

By Assumpta Acam-Oturu*

Besides people who know how to manage and use information and communication technologies (ICTs), Africa needs people schooled in the technical aspects, says Mr. Venancio Massingue. He is Vice Rector of Mozambique's Eduardo Mondlane University and a leading member of the Africa Information Technology Education Trust, a body established by African IT Exhibitions & Conference (AITEC).

Africa's youth are a particular focus of the Trust, which was set up at the August 1999 African Computing and Telecommunications conference in Cambridge, England. Its projects will give young people academic qualifications and also empower them to create their own jobs based on ICTs. Students who can handle computer networking will be "very important" in spreading the Internet throughout Africa and this means projects that "also get the youth in rural areas involved in ICTs."

Nothing will move in Africa if we don't challenge ourselves, if we don't have ambition.

— Venancio Massingue

Faced with widespread illiteracy and numerous languages in Africa, the Trust envisages two important components in the educational process. "One is to know about the technology itself; the other is to put our own culture inside this technology." Africans must soon be able to put their languages "into those computer systems; otherwise, we'll get English and French, Chinese and Japanese," Mr. Massingue adds.

Within a regulatory environment that encourages network expansion, African countries should focus on wireless-based technology that makes it much easier to reach remote areas. He notes the potential of solar power, adding that radio-based systems that are relatively cheap to run are already transmitting information and making a big impact on communities.

Become 'results oriented'

At the same time, Mr. Massingue challenges fellow Africans to become more "results-oriented instead of making fine speeches. "We have to improve the culture by changing the attitude." When he told people in 1989 that he wanted to establish the Internet in Mozambique, they said it was impossible. By 1992, "people were already receiving e-mails in Mozambique. In 1994, we already had full Internet service." Instead of three months for letters to reach or arrive from Europe and the US, "we could send a letter and get a reply in 15 minutes! This changed people's thinking completely."

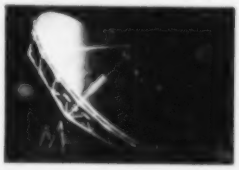
He has been encouraging Africans to collaborate in developing appropriate software, but there has been more talk than action. "While you are still thinking about developing software for accounting, a couple of packages come from abroad, and people tell you you're wasting time. If there is no strategy, then yes, you are wasting time."

Mr. Massingue is convinced that African countries can become competitive in software development "because it is all about ideas. We won't invent another transistor, but with the minimal hardware required, we can do a lot."

Computer hardware is still prohibitively expensive but the AITEC Trust is raising funds so that African students can start developing software. "We have people writing small programmes" but not yet the kind of software that will have an impact on the market. India invested a lot in the software side; now it is getting a lot of contracts to develop software. We'll have to be creative and create our own software that will be useful to other people."

However, nothing will move "if we don't challenge ourselves, if we don't have ambition." African countries can bring down computer hardware costs by developing an information technology industry in Africa, he adds, urging them to make investments that "enable us to get access to the technology." Africa has been exporting good soccer players who did not have proper balls when they were young. "They made substitute balls and developed skills. Young people need to get to the same level in terms of information technology. They have to get things they can play with and begin to build interest."

This means properly conceived training programmes and collaborative action at national and regional level. He recalls complaints in 1995 about telephone calls from Maputo to Kampala that went through Portugal to Britain and then to Uganda. "What prevents us from laying fibre optic cable? One country can pay for one segment, another country for the next. Why is it impossible to have a high-speed link between two neighbouring countries? Why do you have to go through Europe just because we have been doing this for 20 or 30 years? We need will power and a strategy to make things change." ■



**Host and producer of "Spotlight Africa" on KPFK Pacifica Radio, Los Angeles, California.*

Food security through science

UN institute promotes innovation and collaboration among African researchers

By **Ernest Harsch**
Accra

To combat hunger and improve food security in their continent, Africans must make better use of science to overcome soil degradation, says Mr. Uzo Mokwunye, director of the UN's Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (INRA). "Farmers know that low soil fertility is a major problem, but nobody is doing anything about it," he said in an interview at the institute's headquarters at the University of Ghana, Legon, near Accra.

According to UN studies, about 72 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's cropland and 31 per cent of its pastureland is degraded, contributing to enormous losses in output. Meanwhile, 35 per cent of Africa's children are malnourished. If current trends continue, by 2025 the region will produce enough food for only 40 per cent of its projected 1 billion people.

Thus far, most agricultural research is devoted to developing high-yielding seeds, Mr. Mokwunye notes. But, he adds, a green revolution "will be impossible in Africa" unless soil quality is improved so that these new varieties can thrive. With both high-yielding seeds and more fertile soil, rice and wheat yields could double, sorghum yields could triple and maize yields could quadruple.

Research therefore must intensify to tackle the problem. "Africans must take the lead in reversing the degradation of natural resources," says INRA's "strategic plan" for 2000-2004. "The challenge is to bring modern science to bear on fully exploiting the inherent production and commercial potential of natural resources."

Networking and coordination

INRA, which is part of the Tokyo-based UN University, supports work by African scientists on soil fertility, biodiversity and other related areas. Believing that there is no single solution to improving agricultural output or better utilization of Africa's natural resources generally, the institute pursues a holistic approach that cuts across sectors and ranges from laboratory research to broad policy issues.

The institute's own resources are very limited, however. The paid-up value of its endowment fund currently stands at just $2.6 mn, a fraction of the $50 mn requirement initially estimated when INRA was established in 1986. The institute did not actually find a permanent home in Africa until 1993, when the government of Ghana agreed to host it. INRA is now seeking $15 mn to develop five regional facilities, and to further develop its Mineral Resources Unit in Zambia.

"We know that there are talents in Africa's universities and research institutes. ... So we try to bring these people together."
— Mr. Uzo Mokwunye

With limited means of its own, the institute seeks to further its goals by forging close collaborative relationships with African universities and research institutions. Its mission, in fact, is to help strengthen their capacities, through direct training programmes and by building up networks of scientists working on similar problems.

"Our role is not necessarily to do the research ourselves," Dr. Mokwunye explains. "But we know that there are talents in Africa's universities and research institutes. Often they don't have the resources to work. So we try to bring these people together."

INRA calls such a network a "college of research associates." The members of a college remain at their own institutions, but coordinate their work under INRA's guidance. One project — to determine the status of herbaria (plant collections) in various African countries — is coordinated by a professor in Nigeria, but also involves specialists in five African sub-regions.

In Bonsu, Ghana, another INRA unit is working on genetic conservation. The institute hopes to develop it into a regional facility, to help conserve plant germplasm from throughout West Africa. While each country should have its own centre, Dr. Mokwunye advises, it is vital to also have a regional repository. If civil strife leads to the destruction of national germplasm holdings, as in Sierra Leone, then the regional facility can later help reproduce them.

At the University of Ghana, the institute is developing a high-quality botanical laboratory, and has already organized courses on tissue culture for dozens of researchers from across Africa. Once the lab is fully equipped, INRA hopes to attract botanists interested in doing research there, including Africans living outside the continent. "African botanists in the diaspora, because of the lack of facilities, have not come home," Dr. Mokwunye notes. But with the existence of such a laboratory, they "can come in the summer, work in that facility, train some young African scientists, and leave a little bit of themselves behind."

Another such "centre of excellence" is being developed at the University of Dschang, in Cameroon, to train African scientists in using modern computer technology for natural resources work.

'Recapitalizing' Africa's soils

Many of Africa's soils have low levels of nitrogen and phosphorous, vital for plant growth. The decline of shifting cultivation because of growing population density in many countries has further leached African soils of such essential minerals. With the elimination of, or drastic reduction in, government subsidies for agriculture resulting from structural adjustment programmes, many farmers cannot afford fertilizers to improve the land.

One of INRA's goals is to alert African governments to the severity of the problem, and encourage them to develop national soil fertility action plans. The purpose, says Dr. Mokwunye, is "creating awareness and gaining a national momentum on what needs to be done, and how to do it," involving as many actors as possible, including government institutions, farmers, private companies and donor agencies. So far, only Ghana and Burkina Faso have drawn up such national plans, but INRA is actively disseminating those experiences to other countries in West Africa.

As part of this effort, the institute is drawing attention to the importance of minerals, especially phosphates, for agricultural output. "Phosphorous is missing in almost all African soils," Dr. Mokwunye points out. "And yet, almost every African country has its local deposit of phosphate rock. So if we can use these local resources, we can solve quite a bit of the problem."

The properties of such phosphate rock differ greatly from one African country to another, with the minerals in some dissolving more easily into the soil. The deposits in Mali and Niger, for example, are highly soluble, and often the

soil's own acidity is sufficient to draw out the phosphorous for plant growth. But most phosphate rock in Africa is "unreactive" and requires processing before it can be used as fertilizer. One INRA researcher in Togo is studying the effects on soil fertility of partially converted phosphate rock, while the institute's Mineral Resources Unit in Zambia is working on the engineering aspects of a pilot processing plant.

INRA, Mr. Mokwunye adds, is very concerned about the economic feasibility of such projects, since a key goal is to convince the private sector that investment in phosphate processing plants can be profitable. By better tapping the continent's own mineral riches, farmers will be able to improve the fertility of their fields, a process INRA calls "recapitalizing the soil."

Indigenous crops

Another area which INRA feels has been neglected by other research institutions is Africa's indigenous crops, such as cassava, millet and a wide variety of other foods and medicinal plants that traditionally have been widely used in Africa's countryside. Not only is little research being done to improve their yields or find better uses for them, but some of the lesser-known crops actually are disappearing, surveys by INRA have found.

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), supported by the World Bank, has five centres in Africa, and all 16 of its centres worldwide conduct research in Africa. But, Mr. Mokwunye notes, most of them work on crops such as maize, wheat, potatoes and rice. "None of these is indigenous to Africa," he observes. "And yet we have indigenous crops, including cereals like teff. Teff is still the major cereal in Ethiopia. It is difficult to work with, but Ethiopian scientists fortunately have stuck to their research and are improving it."

INRA encourages the CGIAR centres to continue working on their selected crops, since "food security involves more than just eating roots and tubers." But the institute itself chooses to concentrate its own work on these neglected, endangered crops. Apart from their importance for food security and biodiversity, there also is a commercial aspect. "If they are indigenous to us, then we have a comparative advantage in producing them," Mr. Mokwunye points out. "If we can multiply them, then we can expand our export base. We can actually be the ones to sell to Europe, rather than Europe taking the things they grow in their greenhouses and selling to us."

Preserving and better developing Africa's rich natural storehouse requires devoting greater attention to the role of women, INRA argues. "In Africa," says the institute's strategic plan, "women are not only the managers of natural resources but also the main reservoirs of indigenous knowledge on Africa's food crops and useful plants." Therefore, a high premium should be placed on research and training to enhance women's capacities as natural resource managers. ■

A trainee in plant tissue technology at INRA's University of Ghana laboratory

Mixed progress in combating African hunger

While some African countries have achieved significant progress in reducing hunger, many others are seeing even higher numbers of undernourished people, reports the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). According to the first edition of the agency's *State of Food Insecurity in the World*, released in October, 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa achieved a reduction of 21 million undernourished citizens between 1980 and 1996. In fact, five of them — Ghana, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Nigeria and Mali — marked the greatest decreases in the world. Yet at the same time another 22 sub-Saharan countries saw their numbers of undernourished increase by 114 million over the same period, while 6 had decreases too small to keep the proportion of undernourished from increasing.

In 1995-97, the latest years for which comparable data are available, sub-Saharan Africa had a total of 179.6 million undernourished people, and North Africa had another 5.4 million. In the developing world as a whole, there were 791.5 million undernourished people — down from an estimated 830 million at the time of the World Food Summit in 1996. Another 34 million undernourished people live in the industrialized countries (22 million of them in the former Soviet Union).

Overall, the proportion of undernourished people in Africa has been declining between 1979-81 and 1995-97, from 37 per cent to 33 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 per cent to 4 per cent in North Africa. Despite this progress, sub-Saharan Africa still claims the highest prevalence of undernourishment in the world, although its total number of undernourished falls far behind the 525.5 million people in Asia and the Pacific. The prevalence rate in Asia and the Pacific has decreased markedly, however, from 32 per cent in 1979-81 to 17 per cent in 1995-97. The FAO report cites rapid economic growth as one of the key factors in this decline, while uneven economic growth combined with war, drought and other calamities have contributed to the more mixed picture in Africa.

WTO

from page 1

Africa, which has 23 of the WTO's 29 least developed countries (LDCs), arrived in Seattle with a set of proposals to do exactly that. While the US and Europe sought a wide-ranging "millennium round" of talks on complex new issues, including investment, competition policy, electronic commerce, and labour and environmental standards, many African, Asian and Latin American countries championed a "development round" to review implementation of Uruguay agreements of particular importance to developing countries (see page 35).

Seattle Post-Intelligencer - Grant M. Haller

Delegates from Chad and the Central African Republic listen to WTO Director-General Mike Moore in Seattle. African ministers were systematically excluded from trade talks.

By focusing on implementation issues, the South hoped to finally pry open developed countries' markets to its imports, remove other structural imbalances and biases against developing countries, completely eliminate tariffs on exports from LDCs, and expand and institutionalize trade-related technical assistance and capacity-building programmes. The proposals also would extend and enforce the "special and preferential" provisions of the Uruguay agreements intended to assist the integration of developing countries into the global trading system by exempting them from certain WTO requirements and timelines.

In the view of most developing country delegates, negotiations on new issues should be confined to a previously set "built-in agenda" of talks on agriculture and trade in services. They oppose the introduction of a wide range of new issues until flaws and deficiencies in the current rules are corrected.

Intense preparations

The proposals for a development round were formulated over three years by developing countries with assistance from the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Following the 1996 WTO ministerial meeting in Singapore, UNCTAD convened two expert group meetings to consider a pro-active "Positive Agenda" for developing countries in future global trade negotiations.

At the request of African and other developing countries and with funding from the UN General Assembly, UNCTAD held a series of inter-regional workshops in the Republic of Korea, South Africa and the Dominican Republic on trade negotiation strategies in preparation for the Seattle WTO meeting. The UN agency also convened a second workshop in South Africa for LDCs, and conducted numerous sub-regional seminars on trade issues, including three additional conferences in Africa.

Developing countries emerged from these intensive preparatory meetings far better equipped to participate in the Seattle talks and to advance their issues. In contrast to the relatively low profile they adopted at the Singapore

Trade must benefit the developing world, says UN Secretary-General

The following are excerpts from the address prepared by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan for presentation at the opening ceremony of the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle on 30 November. Because of the disruptions caused by the anti-WTO protests, the opening ceremony did not take place and the speech could not be delivered directly to the delegates.

In the past, developing countries have been told time and again that they stand to benefit from trade liberalization, and that they must open up their economies. They have done so, often at great cost. For the poorest countries, the cost of implementing trade commitments can be more than a whole year's budget. But time and again, they have found the results disappointing — not because free trade is bad for them, but because they are still not getting enough of it....

"It is hardly surprising if developing countries suspect that arguments for using trade policy to advance various good causes are really yet another form of disguised protectionism."

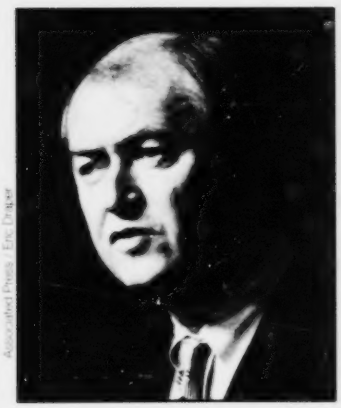
UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

They found that rich countries had cut their tariffs less than poor ones. Not surprisingly, many of them feel they were taken for a ride. Industrialized countries, it seems, are happy enough to export manufactured goods to each other, but from developing countries they still want only raw materials, not finished products. As a result, [industrialized countries'] average tariffs on the manufactured products they import from developing countries are now four times higher than the ones they impose on products that come mainly from other industrialized countries....

So it is hardly surprising if developing countries suspect that arguments for using trade policy to advance various good causes are really yet another form of disguised protectionism....

What is needed is not new shackles for world trade, but greater determination by governments to tackle social and political issues directly — and to give the institutions that exist for that purpose the funds and the authority they need. The United Nations and its specialized agencies are charged with advancing the cause of development, the environment, human rights and labour. We can be part of the solution....

But this meeting and this organization must not be distracted from their vital task — which is to make sure that this time a new round of trade negotiations really does extend the benefits of free trade to the developing world. Unless we convince developing countries that globalization really does benefit them, the backlash against it will become irresistible. That would be a tragedy for the developing world, and indeed for the world as a whole.



Associated Press - Eric Draper

South African Trade and Industry Minister Alec Erwin: "Our interests can no longer be ignored."

meeting and at the 1998 WTO ministerial meeting in Geneva, developing countries submitted nearly half of the 250 proposals tabled for consideration in Seattle.

Developing countries rebel

Given the deep differences between North and South, the task of reaching agreement on a new round of trade liberalization talks in Seattle was a daunting one for the trade ministers of the WTO's 135 member states. Bitter divisions between the US, Europe and Japan over agricultural subsidies, genetically modified food and industrial protectionism made it even less likely that the ministers would resolve issues that had confounded trade officials over months of preparatory negotiations at WTO headquarters in Geneva.

African delegates were optimistic that their agenda would be taken up in Seattle, if only because WTO decisions are made by consensus and developing countries are in the majority. Moreover, in response to sharp criticism of the closed-door negotiating process at the Singapore meeting, where select groups of mostly developed countries met in private "green room" consultations to set policy for the entire body, the organization said it would adopt a more transparent negotiating system in Seattle. Instead of green rooms, informal ministerial working groups, open to all delegates, were to develop draft language for the Seattle Declaration on agriculture, implementation and rules, market access, the Singapore agenda and systemic issues relating to transparency in the WTO's internal procedures. The working groups in turn were to report to the Committee of the Whole, comprised of the ministers of all 135 member states, where the draft declaration would be submitted for final debate and approval.

However, Seattle Chair Charlene Barshefsky, the chief US negotiator on trade issues, made no secret of her willingness to return to the green rooms in order to secure agreement on a new round of trade liberalization talks. "I reserve the right to use a more exclusive process," she told reporters, "to achieve a final outcome." By the end of the first full day of talks, the green rooms were in full operation and African, Latin American and Caribbean delegations again found themselves locked out or ignored.

In one instance, an Africa Group caucus meeting was interrupted when interpreters were suddenly withdrawn in favour of an unscheduled meeting on labour standards convened by the US. Conference staff turned off the microphones as the negotiators left. In another case, ministers from two Caribbean countries were physically barred from entering a green room meeting on agriculture.

One African delegate told *Africa Recovery* that after the overwhelming majority of participants in one working group rejected European proposals for the addition of new issues to the WTO agenda, the chair nonetheless reported a consensus in favour of the EU position. The working groups, the delegate said furiously, "are toy telephones. You can talk into them but they're not connected to anything. Nobody is listening."

The issue finally came to a head on 2 December, after an angry confrontation between developing country ministers and Ms. Barshefsky over their exclusion from the green rooms. Within hours, the Africa Group issued a statement denouncing the process and threatening to block any agreement reached without its participation: "There is no transparency in the proceedings and African countries are being marginalized and generally excluded on issues of vital importance to our peoples.... Under the present circumstances, we will not be able to join the consensus required to meet the objectives of this ministerial conference." The Africans were soon joined by Caribbean governments, which issued a similar statement.

Dangers and opportunities

The unprecedented rebellion prevented the developed countries from pursuing future trade rules damaging to the interests of developing countries and signaled a new willingness by African, Asian and Latin American states to assert their rights within the WTO. South African Trade and Industry Minister Alec Erwin told *Africa Recovery* that the action represented a "watershed."

"The industrial countries now understand that our interests can no longer be ignored," he said, and will have to be accommodated in future talks. But he also pointed out that the failure to adopt a new agenda locked in all the shortcomings of the Uruguay Round that developing countries had sought to change.

One particular danger of the deadlock in Seattle was the expiration on 1 January 2000 of special and preferential exemptions for compliance with WTO regulations on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and Trade Related Investment Measures

Africa Recovery - Michael Deibert

African activists join protests in Seattle. NGOs played an important role inside and outside the meeting.

African NGOs reject new round of trade talks

Prior to the World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial conference in Seattle, 20 African social movements, environmental groups, trade unions and other civil society organizations issued a statement in September 1999 calling for a moratorium on any new round of trade negotiations and for an in-depth review of the impact of existing international trade agreements. The following are excerpts:

We are opposed to any attempt to expand the powers of the WTO through a new comprehensive round of trade liberalization. Instead, governments should review and rectify the deficiencies of the system and the WTO regime itself, as part of the ongoing processes within the WTO.

The Uruguay Round agreements and the establishment of the WTO were proclaimed as a means of enhancing the creation of global wealth and prosperity and promoting the well-being of all people in all member states. In reality, however, in the past five years the WTO regime has contributed to the concentration of wealth in the hands of the rich few, increasing poverty and indebtedness for the majority of the world's population, and [promoting] unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

Those governments that dominate the WTO and that, together with the transnational corporations, have benefited from the WTO system have refused to recognize and address these problems. Instead, they are pushing for further liberalization through the introduction of new issues for adoption in the WTO.

On proposals to pressure countries to further cut industrial tariffs, we wish to state that African countries have already drastically reduced their tariffs (especially under structural adjustment programmes) and this has led to closure of local enterprises and de-industrialization. The WTO should not be used to lock in and further reduce industrial tariffs in Africa and the South. We thus reject another round of industrial tariff cuts. Instead, the North should cut its tariff peaks in products exported by the South.

We call for a moratorium on new issues and further negotiations that expand the scope and power of the WTO. During the moratorium, there should be a comprehensive and in-depth review and assessment of the impacts of existing agreements. Effective steps must be taken to change the inherent imbalances and inequities of the WTO system and in the existing agreements.

The complete text and list of signatories are available on the website: <www.southside.org.sg/souths/twn/title/atn-cn.htm>

(TRIMS). The high degree of institutional capacity required for compliance with the TRIPS and TRIMS rules has proved extremely difficult for developing countries to achieve and the extension of timelines and technical assistance for these and other preferential provisions were an important part of Africa's agenda for a development round. A mid-December meeting of the WTO General Council failed to extend the timelines for compliance with the TRIPS and TRIMS agreements, but did agree to refrain from filing complaints against developing countries until further talks on the issue were held.

Africa's share of world exports (%)

Source: Africa Recovery from UN Statistics Division data

A package of special measures for least developed countries was also a casualty of Seattle. The proposals included the removal of tariffs from LDC exports, accelerated procedures for LDCs seeking WTO membership and greater coordination with other multilateral financial institutions on an "integrated framework" for development that would harmonize trade policies with debt relief and increased investment flows. The proposals enjoyed wide support among WTO members and seemed likely to be adopted as part of any new round of talks. Two separate press briefings scheduled for Seattle on the LDC initiative, one by the WTO secretariat and another by the US and EU, were cancelled and the proposals are unlikely to be enacted until formal talks on a new round are finalized.

Uneven playing field

While proponents of trade liberalization point to the advantages of the WTO "rules-based system" of regulations applicable to all, there is strong evidence that developed countries often violate the rules. At the heart of the demand for review of the implementation of the Uruguay Round agreements is the failure of industrialized countries to open their markets to Southern exports. Access to Northern markets could have a dramatic impact on the economies of developing countries, potentially raising their export revenue by some $700 bn annually, according to the 1999 UNCTAD *Trade and Development Report*.

Formidable barriers to Northern markets remain in place. Tariffs on manufactured products entering industrialized countries' markets from developing countries average four times higher than those imposed on manufactured goods from other industrialized states. UNCTAD notes that import tariffs in developed countries are highest in precisely those sectors — textiles, shoes, leather goods and processed agricultural products — where developing countries could be competitive.

Tariff escalations

Tariff escalations — the rise in duties at every step of processing from raw material to finished product — are another obstacle to increased African trade. Brigadier Moses Ali, Uganda's Second Deputy Prime Minister for Tourism, Trade and Industry, explained how tariff escalations affect Uganda's principal export, coffee. "One way to increase the value of our coffee is to process it at home, add the value in Uganda," he said. "But tariffs on processed coffee are too high, so we are unable to do so. This hurts our people, who need jobs."

While WTO rules permit industrial countries to impose high tariffs and punitive "anti-dumping" duties on low-cost manufactured goods from developing countries, there is no prohibition on the dumping of massively subsidized Northern agricultural exports in African, Asian and Latin American and Caribbean markets. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted in remarks prepared for the opening ceremony of the Seattle meeting (see box, page 30), agricultural subsidies in developed coun-

Africa Recovery - Michael Fleshman

Ghanaian Minister of Trade and Industry John Abu: "Some of the obligations we have taken on create social tensions."

tries — some $250 bn annually — are "threatening the livelihood of millions of poor farmers in the developing world, who cannot compete with subsidized imports."

Non-tariff obstacles, including "phyto-sanitary" (health and safety) standards, also are common. Ghanaian Trade and Industry Minister John Abu told *Africa Recovery* that "barriers have been created against us using what I call excuses. Sometimes they talk about environmental issues. Sometimes they talk of their consumers' concern. Sometimes it happens, and it's a mystery."

He described one case involving the export of Ghanaian yams to the US. "The yams were coming all right, but then all of a sudden they're cut off. They said phyto-sanitary issues and started autoclaving [heat sterilizing] the yams. By the time they finished, the yams were rotten. So we lost the market." Ghana has requested US assistance in building Ghana's ability to meet their standards before products are shipped. "My feeling is that we should have international standards. Then we'll know."

Need for 'coherence'

The inability of African countries to invest in new industries was identified as another major obstacle to producing for world markets. African ministers strongly supported an integrated development framework in Seattle because the sharp drop in official development aid, combined with low levels of foreign direct investment and heavy debt servicing, often made it impossible to take advantage of trade opportunities. Mr. Ali, the Ugandan trade minister, emphasized the importance of debt relief in generating investment capital for the production of new products to trade. "Debt cancellation must not be left out [in Seattle]. It must be part of any declaration. We are beneficiaries of the plan by the G-7 to cancel some of the debt of developing countries, but it's taking time. In the meantime, we're being strangled."

Technical assistance

Africa also came to Seattle to secure more technical assistance in meeting stringent WTO rules and international product standards. At present, WTO training and capacity-building is funded largely from voluntary contributions from member states. This multilateral system is augmented by bilateral trade-related technical programmes, particularly by the US. African countries, however, called on the WTO to expand its capacity-building programme and fund it from the organization's core budget. African countries proposed a phased increase in the core WTO technical assistance budget from the current level of $450,000 to $5.9 mn by 2003. The proposal urged industrial countries to contribute additional funds towards a technical assistance budget of $12.5 mn.

Part of Africa's opposition to the inclusion of new issues in the WTO, said Ghanaian Trade Minister Abu, is the absence of capacity: "To take on new issues that are more complex and require further capacities from African countries is something that worries us. We don't like to tell our colleagues in the developed countries that we won't accept a new round. But we have to be informed how we will be supported to address the new issues that are going to crop up."

Labour and the WTO

Market access concerns also influenced Africa's positions on the controversial issues of labour and environmental standards, which the US in particular sought to bring under WTO jurisdiction. Developing countries were almost universally opposed to the US proposals, not because their governments are hostile to worker rights or environmental protection, but because these were perceived to be thinly disguised protectionist measures advanced on behalf of powerful domestic constituencies in the North. US negotiators initially assured developing countries that the US wanted only to study the relationship between labour and environmental standards and trade, not to bring them under the rules system. President Bill Clinton contradicted that position, however, when he told reporters that countries which violated core labour and environmental standards should be subject to trade sanctions.

Kenyan Ambassador Kipkorir Aly Azad Rana seemed to speak for most delegates from developing countries when he told *Africa Recovery* that his government felt strongly that labour standards should remain the responsibility of the International Labour Organisation and not come under the WTO. "Kenya has no problem with labour rights. We are members in good standing at the ILO. But we do not agree that the WTO should take over the responsibilities of other international bodies. Nor do we accept that certain members of the WTO should introduce major new issues at the last minute and without consultation." Mr. Rana said that Kenya considered the current consulting mechanism between the ILO and the WTO adequate to address genuine trade-related aspects of labour standards.

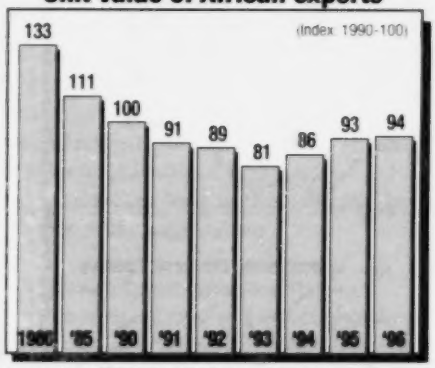
African environmental concerns

Africa's principal environmental concern in Seattle was to ensure that the TRIPS agreement would not allow the patenting of life forms and biological processes, or interfere with traditional farming practices such as the harvesting, exchange and open sale of seeds and produce. The US was particularly eager to extend intellectual property protections to genetically modified organisms — a field dominated by US industry — and to prevent other countries from blocking imports of genetically modified US agricultural products.

The US proposal was strongly opposed by developing countries and the EU endorsed a Kenyan recommendation to require that any WTO regulations on the issue be consistent with the UN Convention on Biodiversity and the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources, which protect the rights of people in developing countries to their traditional knowledge of genetic resources. African countries also strongly supported proposals to exempt essential medicines from TRIPS rules that restrict wide, cost-effective distribution.

In an indication of the political sensitivity of

Unit value of African exports



Source: Africa Recovery from UN Statistics Division data

the biodiversity issue, the EU negotiator announced that it would accept the US position on genetically modified organisms in exchange for US concessions on agricultural subsidies, only to have the agreement disavowed by EU member states concerned about public opinion at home.

Anger at protesters

African non-governmental organizations maintained a significant presence at the Seattle meeting, both on the picket lines and as back-up for African government delegations. The African Trade Network, a coalition of trade unions and other NGOs coordinated by the Accra-based Africa Secretariat of the Third World Network, played a particularly visible role. The organization regularly briefed the press on African issues and helped to popularize Africa's opposition to a broad new round with their slogan, "No New Round! Turn Around!" (see box page 32).

But it was the massive anti-WTO protests by US trade union and environmental activists that had the greatest impact on the Seattle meeting. The demonstrations dominated the press reports, disrupted the conference proceedings and focused unprecedented public attention around the world on the WTO and the controversial issues with which it deals.

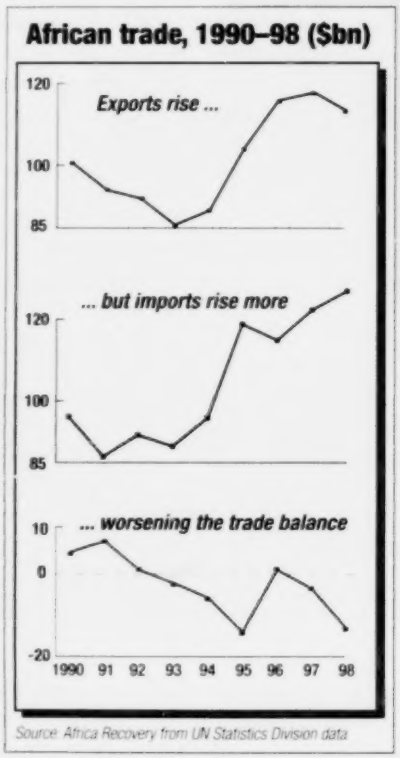
African delegates expressed resentment and dismay at the protesters and their calls to link labour and environmental issues to trade. There was visible anger among delegates at US President Clinton's apparent encouragement of the protests and little support for his call to make the WTO more transparent to its critics. Delegates from developing countries made it very clear that they considered the green rooms to be the key obstacle to transparency in Seattle.

Many delegates viewed the demonstrations as misguided, racist or part of a US plan to impose its agenda through physical intimidation. A group of Latin American and Caribbean delegations issued a statement condemning the US and expressing their "profound surprise and resulting anger at the [WTO] and lack of concern for providing the high dignitaries and delegates attending this ministerial conference with minimum conditions of security and for allowing, in some instances, physical and verbal aggressions against its distinguished guests."

"The issues [protesters] are raising are justified," said Ghana's Mr. Abu. "Some of them are on the agenda and we are addressing them. So don't prevent us from attending our meetings. Some of us were hassled. Some of us were locked in our hotels for four or five hours. I consider that very unfair."

For developing countries, he said, globalization is a reality, both good and bad. In Ghana, for example, "Many commodity prices have dropped and the Ghanaian consumer now has access to cheaper high-quality products that are developed internationally. In that way, living standards are going up."

But Mr. Abu also emphasized the social costs: "Some of the obligations we have taken on create social tensions. Our people sometimes see it as a sellout because our industries are collapsing. They have some kind of fear that the WTO is taking away their jobs." The problem with free trade, he said, is not the theory but the implementation. "It has to be translated in such a way that everybody gains. That is why we came." ■



Source: Africa Recovery from UN Statistics Division data

ACP countries defend trade preferences

The 71 member countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific group (ACP) are negotiating a renewal of the trade and aid agreement with the European Union (EU), known as the Lomé Convention. The current convention runs out on 28 February 2000. Negotiators were optimistic following a 7-9 December round of talks in Brussels that a new accord would be finalized before the expiration date. Under the new arrangement, Lomé V, the EU would agree to provide E13.8 bn ($14.1 bn) in aid during 2000-2005 through the European Development Fund and another E1.7 bn in loans through the European Investment Bank.

However, extension of the favourable trade preferences for ACP countries has fallen under the shadow of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Since the first Lomé Convention in 1975, the ACP countries — all former European colonies — have enjoyed preferential access to European markets for many of their exports. But because they are not required to extend comparable preferences to European goods entering their own markets, the arrangement is deemed to violate the WTO's insistence on "reciprocity."

Previously, the EU applied for and received a waiver from the WTO to permit "non-reciprocal" preferences. It could seek another formal waiver, but has not yet publicly committed itself to such a course. Instead, EU negotiators have been trying to win agreement from the ACP countries on ways of bringing the Lomé Convention's trade arrangements in line with WTO rules. The ACP countries have argued that they need at least 10 years for their economies to adapt to more liberalized trade practices. A compromise worked out by the negotiators in Brussels provides for an 8-year "roll-over" period for current preferences, while a new, more open trade regime would be implemented over another 10-12 years.

Yet anxiety remains high. A meeting of the ACP states in the Dominican Republic just a few days before the opening of the WTO gathering in Seattle issued a strong plea for giving developing countries time to adapt to global competition. Madagascar President Didier Ratsiraka drew the strongest applause when he lashed out at globalization as a "totalitarian doctrine" and accused the WTO of seeking to impose rules "on all human activities, defining them from now on as commercial objects."

In the wake of the failure of the Seattle meeting, the EU should not be so worried about bringing the Lomé Convention within WTO rules, Côte d'Ivoire Minister of Commodities Guy-Alain Gauze said at a press conference during the subsequent Brussels negotiations.

Africa's agenda for the WTO

Africa brought a set of common demands to the WTO Ministerial meeting. They drew on a series of reports and consultations concluded during the months leading up to the Seattle conference, including a July African Economic Community (ECA) meeting in Addis Ababa, a September ministerial meeting of the ECA and Organization of African Unity in Algiers, and the "Positive Agenda for Developing Countries in Future Trade Negotiations," issued by the UN Conference on Trade and Development in November. The following summarizes some of the main points.

For a 'development round'

African countries argue that the industrial North has largely failed to implement key provisions of existing WTO agreements that benefit developing countries, and has interpreted others in ways that erode Africa's competitive advantage in such areas as agriculture, textiles and leather goods. African governments have therefore called for a "development round" of trade negotiations to review implementation of the current Uruguay Round accords. Africa is strongly opposed to the European Union's call for an expanded "millennium round" of negotiations on such complex and sensitive issues as investment, competition policy, government procurement and electronic commerce.

Maintaining 'special and differential' treatment

Many of the trade rules intended to benefit developing countries, including "special and differential" exemptions from certain WTO requirements, were set to expire on 1 January 2000. Grain marketing mechanisms needed to avert famine, for example, may run contrary to WTO provisions on market access. African ministers call for maintaining and expanding such existing exemptions and for a formal review of implementation procedures by the North.

Opening Northern markets

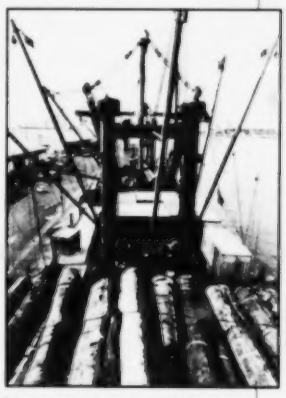
The World Bank estimates that high tariffs, anti-dumping regulations and technical barriers to trade in industrial countries cost sub-Saharan Africa $20 bn annually in lost exports. Africa wants current WTO rules reviewed to force open Northern markets to African exports and remove tariffs on all imports from least developed countries (LDCs).

Coordinating trade with investment and aid

African countries argue that they are often caught between the conflicting demands of bilateral aid donors, multilateral lending agencies and the WTO, while the decline in official development assistance and insufficient foreign direct investment makes it harder to produce new goods and services for export. Africa therefore seeks greater coordination among international aid, trade and investment policies.

Technology transfers and technical assistance

African and other developing countries accuse the industrialized North of failing to abide by previous agreements to transfer industrial and information technology and provide the degree of technical assistance required by the South to implement WTO agreements. Africa seeks a review of the agreements on investment and intellectual property to increase technology transfer to developing countries, as well as more time to implement certain highly technical WTO agreements.



Mahogany logs readied for shipment in Côte d'Ivoire. Despite trade liberalization, US and European markets remain closed to most African exports.

No patents on life forms, biological processes

The Africa Group has called for changing the Uruguay Round agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to prohibit the patenting of life forms and biological processes. African countries maintain that the TRIPS agreement should be consistent with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which takes into full account the sustainable use of plant and animal resources and the rights and knowledge of indigenous communities. The Africa Group also argues that the TRIPS agreement should be applied to essential medicines in a way that ensures their availability at reasonable cost.

Labour and environmental standards

While acknowledging the importance of labour and environmental standards, African governments oppose their incorporation within the WTO framework, viewing such linkages as justification for greater protectionism by developed countries. Africa supports improved coordination between the WTO and the International Labour Organisation on trade-related labour matters and finds the WTO's existing Committee on Trade and Environment adequate for environmental issues within its competence.

Regional trade agreements

Africa seeks to continue the existing waiver permitting regional trade agreements, including the Lomé Convention (see box, page 34), as well as efforts toward freer trade within African sub-regions by the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern African Development Community. These arrangements sometimes offer greater advantages to Africa than do the WTO agreements.

Easing membership

Africa supports an accelerated, transparent and simplified membership process for developing countries seeking to enter the WTO. The process should include expanded technical assistance to applicants to ensure both fulfillment of WTO membership criteria and effective participation by new members. ■

Basic education for all Africans

Oxfam proposes compact for increased educational financing

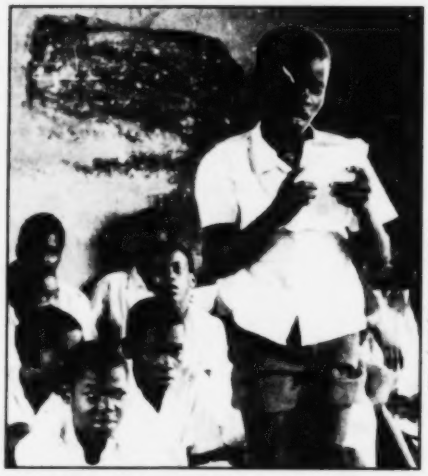
By Kevin Watkins

"Education," wrote Julius Nyerere, "is not a way of escaping the country's poverty. It is a way of fighting it." Those words of the late president of Tanzania captured the mood of a whole generation of post-independence African leaders who saw education as the key to human development, democracy and prosperity. But four decades on, as governments prepare for the World Forum on Education for All, to be held in Dakar, Senegal, in late April, educational deprivation threatens to consign Africa to an increasingly marginal and impoverished future.

The Dakar conference will review progress achieved since the World Conference on Education for All in Thailand in 1990, when over 155 governments pledged to ensure that all people would have access to a good quality basic education by the end of the decade. The record in sub-Saharan Africa speaks for itself. Over half of all women and one-third of men in sub-Saharan Africa enter the new millennium in a state of illiteracy — and the numbers are going up. Meanwhile, over 40 million children of primary school age — almost half of the total age group — are out of school. Millions more drop out before having gained basic literacy skills. Across much of the region, the basic education infrastructure is in a dilapidated state, providing a poor quality learning environment that produces poor results and the developing world's lowest rate of transition to secondary and higher education.

At the UN Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995, governments established universal primary education as one of the key human development targets for 2015. But if current trends continue, Africa will miss this target by a wide margin. It is now the only developing region in which the number of children out of school is going up. By 2015, there will be around 57 million out of school. These children will account for 12 per cent of their global age group, but for three-quarters of all children worldwide not in school.

The human costs of the education crisis in Africa are incalculable. Each additional year of primary education for a country's girls is associated with an 8 per cent decline in the national child mortality rate. Education also helps generate the patterns of inclusive growth on which poverty reduction depends, and it provides the foundations for accountable governance.



UN/Africa Recovery/Polly Pleass

Tanzanian school: Universal primary education in Africa requires shifting spending from military and debt-servicing budgets.

There is no shortage of culprits for the education crisis in Africa. Protracted civil wars in countries such as Angola and Sudan and bad education policies have contributed. But underfinancing is perhaps the single most pervasive problem. Economic stagnation and rapid population growth has reduced real spending per pupil by over 20 per cent since 1980, with devastating implications for the quality of education. One recent study covering 10 African countries found that one-third of children were sitting in classrooms without blackboards.

Misplaced domestic priorities are partly responsible for such problems. Governments such as Zambia, Chad and Mali spend less than 1 per cent of gross domestic product on basic education. Military budgets continue to claim a larger share of public revenue than primary school budgets. But international factors also have contributed. Contrary to donor pledges, aid budgets for Africa have been cut by $3 bn in the 1990s. Meanwhile, debt servicing has been absorbing twice as much revenue as investment in primary education. There are half-a-million Zambian children out of school, but for every $1 the country spends on primary education another $6 are spent on debt servicing.

Structural adjustment programmes have also borne heavily on education budgets. Around 14 African countries have cut per capita spending on education under programmes proposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, in some cases — such as Zambia, Zimbabwe and Niger — by more than 3 per cent per annum.

When public investment collapses, the quality of education inevitably deteriorates — and households pick up the bill in the form of school charges. Private spending by households now covers more than two-thirds of total education spending in countries such as Mali and Tanzania. This process of privatization by default has placed education beyond the means of the poorest households, with girls the first to suffer as financial pressures bite.

The education picture in Africa is not entirely bleak. Over the past two years Uganda has increased school enrolments by over 2 million by withdrawing school fees and, with donor support, massively increasing public spending. Far-reaching reforms also have been initiated in Mozambique and Burkina Faso.

The problem is that, even with good policies in place, many African governments lack the financing capacity to achieve the 2015 goal of universal primary education. What makes this situation so disconcerting is that universal primary education is an affordable option for the international community. Total costs are estimated at around $3.6 bn a year for 10 years — equivalent to about two days' worth of global military spending.

The Dakar conference provides a real opportunity to back the international community's commitment to the development goal of universal primary education with resources. This is why Oxfam is proposing to the conference a Compact for Africa. Under the compact, $2 bn would be provided through increased aid and debt relief. These resources would help to underpin and accelerate national education programmes. But the compact also would provide a focal point for mobilizing the political will and the partnerships between governments and civil society needed to overcome what is arguably the greatest single human development challenge facing us at the start of the 21st century. ■

Kevin Watkins is Senior Policy Advisor for Oxfam, United Kingdom and Ireland, a non-governmental organization carrying out sustainable development activities in Africa and other regions.

NetAid: new approach against poverty

UNDER THE BAOBAB TREE

The African Baobab is one of the world's hardiest trees, thriving in even the most arid environment. It is also the tree under which some Africans traditionally meet to decide issues of common concern.

by
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"The international community must not see NetAid as the extended begging hand of the South directed toward the North," President Alpha Oumar Konaré of Mali said on 9 October as he logged onto the NetAid website <www.netaid.org> from the Presidential Palace in Bamako.

By logging on, President Konaré joined other world leaders in supporting the NetAid initiative, an ambitious effort to harness the power of the Internet to galvanize public support for humanitarian programmes. NetAid aims to use the reach and power of the World Wide Web to raise global consciousness about extreme poverty in developing countries and to mobilize support to eradicate it.

President Konaré's concern is not misplaced. With a large percentage of the 1.3 billion people who must eke out an existence on less than a dollar a day living in the South, particularly in Africa, there is every possibility that the world may see NetAid as just another way for the South to beg for help.

President Konaré does not think this should be so. He believes that NetAid must be seen as an opportunity for exchange and understanding aimed at attacking the worst cases of poverty around the world.

The NetAid organizers agree. Conceived as a partnership between the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Cisco Systems, a leading US information technology company, the NetAid website is designed to serve as a global forum for people and groups wanting to exchange ideas and work together to eradicate extreme poverty.

Wyclef Jean rocks the crowds at Giants Stadium, near New York, at NetAid concert.

Three concerts, held in New York, London and Geneva on 9 October, formed the centrepiece of the strategy to launch the NetAid website and take NetAid's message to millions of people around the world. Broadcast live simultaneously on the World Wide Web and globally on radio and television, the concerts featured some of the today's leading artists. At Giants Stadium, near New York, singer Mary J. Blige held court alongside Bon Jovi, Busta'Rhymes, Sheryl Crow, Counting Crows, Black Crows, Wyclef Jean with Bono, Jimmy Page and friends, Puff Daddy, Jewel, Sting with Cheb Mami, and Zucchero. At Wembley Stadium in London, Bryan Adams took the stage along with David Bowie, Bush, Catatonia, The Corrs, The Eurythmics, George Michael, Stereophonics and Robbie Williams. The Geneva concert held at the Palais des Nations, featured Des'ree, Bryan Ferry, Michael Kamen and Orchestra and the group Texas.

The organizers report that by 15 October, NetAid's website recorded more than 40 mn "hits" from people in 160 countries, including more than 2,000 non-governmental organizations seeking to be part of this novel approach to the war on poverty.

Like President Konaré, US President Bill Clinton, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and former President Nelson Mandela of South Africa also are supporting NetAid. On 8 September, the three leaders, linked by satellite at a ceremony held in New York, became the first "world citizens" to log onto the NetAid website.

"NetAid sends a powerful signal that we intend to use the Internet to improve the lives of all people, not just those wealthy enough to afford computers," said President Clinton at the ceremony hosted by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown and Cisco Systems chief executive John Chambers.

President Mandela expressed confidence that "NetAid can help build a better world and increase bonds among people through the Internet." The organizers of NetAid stress that the strength of the initiative is not in its fund-raising capabilities but its potential to raise awareness and provide education about poverty. The NetAid website is unique. It offers visitors a chance to get directly involved in the fight against global poverty. It lists poverty eradication programmes in developing countries under five categories: hunger, human rights, Third World debt, environment and refugees. Visitors can read about the lives, hopes and achievements of the men, women and children who have benefited from these projects and then take action by donating their time, money and/or expertise.

In the words of Mr. Malloch Brown, "NetAid will have achieved its goal if it succeeds in helping people see that development is an extraordinary force for change in the lives of the world's poor." ■

AFRICA IN BRIEF

Privatization of security is no solution for Africa, says GCA

Private security companies are a growth industry in Africa, reflecting the failure of many African governments to ensure peace and security for their citizens, notes the Global Coalition for Africa (GCA) in its 1999/2000 annual report. The proliferation of light weapons and prolonged economic difficulties have spurred a sharp rise in violent crime, outstripping the ability of inefficient, corrupt and poorly trained public security forces to control the problem, notes the Washington-based group, which seeks to spur discussion on contentious or neglected African development issues.

As a result of the weakness of many African governments, militaries and police forces, private security agencies have emerged to fill the void, providing a wide spectrum of services: guarding installations, protecting convoys, supporting humanitarian assistance operations, intelligence, logistical support, military training and even combat. While in some instances they may play a positive, short-term role in avoiding further violence, they provide no long-term solution to Africa's security problems. Since only the rich and powerful can afford private security, the poor do not benefit, and a reliance on private forces may contribute to greater erosion of public policing. Moreover, those engaged in combat at the "low end of the market," including mercenaries, often aggravate the threats to peace and stability.

Unfortunately, Africa's development partners have paid little attention to bolstering the ability of public security forces to carry out their responsibilities, argues the GCA. In fact, aid agencies "have been more concerned with cutting military spending than improving the professionalism of the security forces." In the mid-1990s, there was an average of only 2 soldiers for every thousand people across the continent, down from a rate of 3.1 per thousand in 1979 and well below the developing country average of 3.5. African governments, with external assistance where necessary, must "dedicate themselves to building competent, well-managed and adequately supplied security forces," emphasizes the GCA.

Meanwhile, adds the report, national and international laws regulating private security forces need to be reviewed and strengthened. Currently, no international law covers private security companies. There are conventions against the use of mercenaries, but most private security forces and activities do not fall within the definition of the term. ■

A prize for women farmers

On behalf of all African women food farmers, Ms. Nagbila Aisseta (left), from the village of Zincko in Burkina Faso, accepted the 1999 Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger, at a ceremony held in New York on 9 October. A few days later she returned home to begin a months-long relay, in which the prize statue will be passed, like a torch, from one group of women farmers to another, in Burkina Faso, Benin, Ghana, Senegal, Uganda, Malawi and Nigeria.

Presented annually by the Hunger Project, an international non-governmental organization headquartered in New York, the prize honours efforts toward improving food security in Africa. In 1999 for the first time, it was awarded symbolically to all African women food farmers, to highlight their fundamental role. Although women produce about 80 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's food, notes a Hunger Project study, they own only about 1 per cent of the land, receive less than 7 per cent of farm extension services and obtain less than 10 per cent of the credit given to small-scale farmers.

"For women food farmers to get what they need," Ugandan Vice-President Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe told the awards ceremony, "policies must change and budgets must increase. We, as African leaders, must take responsibility for making these changes.... As an African woman leader, you can count on me to make every effort to unleash this great river of women's creativity." ■

Drug companies join UN in combating malaria

At a time when many major pharmaceutical corporations have been reducing research on anti-malarial remedies because of the drugs' limited profitability, several have joined with the UN's World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank in a programme to reverse the trend, called the Medicines for Malaria Venture.

Each year, between 300 million and 500 million people become ill with malaria, and more than 1 million die, most of them children in Africa. Malaria's toll is greater than that of all other tropical parasitic diseases combined. The malady is becoming more difficult to combat because new strains arise that are resistant to older medicines, requiring new ones to be developed. However, since many of malaria's victims are in very poor countries, and therefore cannot afford costly medicines, commercial profit margins are low and private companies have little incentive to engage in expensive research.

Under the new programme, participating companies share the effort of developing new drugs with academic researchers. So far, Glaxo Wellcome of the UK is pairing up with Bristol University, SmithKline Beecham of the US with the University of California and Roche of Switzerland with the University of Nebraska. The project, which also is being supported by the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and the Swiss and UK governments, among others, has a $30 mn annual budget and plans to develop a new anti-malaria drug every five years. ■

AIDS saps Africa's educational systems

In Zambia, the number of teachers dying from AIDS is greater than the output from all of the country's teacher-training colleges combined, and the rate is expected to increase significantly, from 680 in 1996 to 2,000 by the year 2005, according to a study by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). In one of Kenya's eight provinces, between 20 and 30 teachers die each month, while the death toll among teachers in Namibia may reach a cumulative total of between 3,500 and 6,500 by the year 2010.

Presented at a conference of African education ministers held in South Africa in early December, the UNICEF study reports that the educational systems in much of Eastern and Southern Africa are experiencing increasing problems due to the absenteeism and loss of teachers, education officers, inspectors and planning and management personnel. Evidence suggests that the incidence of HIV infections sometimes is higher among teachers than the population in general, possibly since many are in higher income groups than other people in rural

areas and tend to engage in more risky sexual behaviour, says the study. Even where new teachers replace those who have died of AIDS, they tend to be less experienced and less well trained, eroding the overall quality of education. ■

Campaign to target female genital mutilation

Representatives from nine West African countries met in Dakar, Senegal, in early December to map out a campaign against the widespread practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). Supported by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the workshop drew participants from government ministries and civil society organizations from Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

They agreed to develop a plan of action for the sub-region, to begin in 2000, to reduce and eventually eliminate FGM, involving women's associations, health personnel, community leaders, the media, teachers and other sectors. They also plan to establish an Internet databank with information on FGM in Africa.

Three countries in Africa already have passed laws against FGM: Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire in 1996 and Senegal in 1999. But even in those countries the practice continues, workshop participants noted, pointing to the need for an effective and sustained public education campaign to explain that FGM is a form of violence against women and that it can seriously endanger their health. ■

US interest in boosting Africa's energy use

Energy and economy ministers from nearly three dozen African countries gathered in Tucson, Arizona, on 14-16 December to discuss how the continent can more effectively utilize its vast energy resources and how the US public and private sectors can become better involved. Opened by US Energy Secretary Bill Richardson, the conference was one of several initiatives over the past two years designed to signal more active US interest in African affairs.

Although Africa's commercial production of energy has nearly doubled since 1970, the continent accounts for only 7 per cent of world energy production, according to figures cited at the conference. Of Africa's total production, about 63 per cent is accounted for by oil, 19 per cent by coal, 15 per cent by gas, 2.3 per cent by hydro-electricity, and 0.5 per cent by nuclear generation. Because of Africa's widespread poverty and low level of industrialization, its share of global energy consumption has risen from only 2 per cent to 3 per cent between 1970 and 1997.

Conference participants discussed ways to increase investment in the energy sector, facilitate public-private dialogue on project financing and application of appropriate technologies, including energy technologies for rural development. While acknowledging the need for Africa's energy production and consumption to rise, conference participants also emphasized the importance of doing so in efficient ways, so as to minimize greenhouse gas emissions. ■

Julius K. Nyerere, 1922 – 1999

The first president of the United Republic of Tanzania (1961-85) and one of Africa's most renowned statesmen, Julius Kambarage Nyerere died in London on 14 October 1999, of leukemia. The following are excerpts from just a few of the many tributes to Mwalimu ("teacher" in Swahili, as he was widely known) delivered at the massive funeral ceremony in Dar es Salaam on 21 October or at memorial meetings elsewhere:

Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa: Today the wretched of our continent have begun to walk with a firm tread in their step, confident of a better future for themselves and for the African motherland. They walk tall, with straight backs, no longer afraid to look into the eyes of those who had sought to set themselves up as rapacious demi-gods.... On the shoulders of these generations rests the duty to answer the drawn-out cries of those who were enslaved and colonized by strangers and abused by their own kith and kin. They rest on firm ground because they stand on the foundation of stone that Mwalimu Julius Nyerere built.

In it are infused the passions which constituted his wealth – love for the people and loyalty to their cause; commitment to the cause of peace; attachment to principle; honesty, simplicity, humility and personal integrity; courage and a great intellect; the capacity to sustain hope at the most difficult moments; the determination to ensure that the sun shone over Africa, to banish the dark centuries which have been our heritage.

Benjamin Mkapa, President of Tanzania: He leaves us a legacy of peace and unity which is admired throughout the world. It is not a legacy we can allow to be squandered.... If he was still with us today, he would ask us to take over his crusade against poverty, exploitation and discrimination.... He would urge us to move much more quickly to integrate African economies and promote African unity. He would appeal for collective South-South self-reliance.

Theo Ben-Gurirab, UN General Assembly President, Foreign Minister of Namibia: Thirty-six years ago, I arrived in the then Tanganyika, as a young lad ... fired on from inside by a powerful force of pan-Africanism.... The Mwalimu I met was the liberator, thinker, strategist, organizer and our kinder and gentler teacher on the politics of liberation, African unity, nation-building and internationalist solidarity with the people of the Third World.... It was Mwalimu who, together with the great Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, strengthened decisively my own commitment for Namibia's liberation and national independence.

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General: He was a passionate and eloquent advocate for Africa and for the entire developing world, as well as a friend and ally of the United Nations. Above all, Mwalimu Nyerere, as the founding father of Tanzania, played a key role in promoting African independence, nation-building and unity, and his willingness to step down from office voluntarily after long service to his people should be a model to all leaders. Both before and after leaving office, he gave unstintingly of his strength and wisdom in the quest for African peace and freedom. Even in his last month, he worked tirelessly to bring peace to the troubled people of Burundi.

AFRICA WATCH

RWANDA

Inquiry finds UN failure to halt 1994 genocide

Kofi Annan: expresses "deep remorse" over UN's failure to prevent Rwanda genocide.

Responsibility for the failure to halt the 1994 genocide in Rwanda lies with the UN system, members of the UN Security Council — the US and UK in particular — and other UN member states, according to the report of an independent inquiry made public at UN headquarters in New York on 16 December.

In a statement, Secretary-General Kofi Annan — who had called for the inquiry — expressed his "deep remorse" over the UN's failure to halt the massacre of 800,000 men, women and children. He said one of his major goals as Secretary-General is to make sure the UN never again fails to protect a civilian population from mass slaughter. "All of us must bitterly regret that we did not do more to prevent it."

The three-person inquiry team was led by former Primer Minister Ingvar Carlsson of Sweden, and included former Foreign Minister Hun Sung-Joo of the Republic of Korea and retired Lieutenant-General Rufus M. Kupolati of Nigeria. It had full access to UN records and interviewed more than 100 witnesses.

"There was a serious gap between the mandate and the political realities in Rwanda and between the mandate and the resources dedicated to it," Mr.Carlsson told a news conference at UN headquarters in December, referring to the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). The inquiry concluded that the UN mission had not been planned, deployed or instructed in a way that would have enabled it to stop the genocide. UNAMIR, it said, was also the victim of a lack of political will in the Security Council and by other member states.

"This international responsibility is one which warrants a clear apology by the Organization and by the members states concerned to the Rwandese people," the report says.

The inquiry noted that a number of steps have been taken over the past few years to improve the UN's capacity to respond to conflicts, and specifically to respond to some of the mistakes made in Rwanda.

The Secretary-General said that while the report acknowledged that some steps have been taken over the past few years to improve the UN's capacity to respond to conflicts — and to ensure it will not repeat some of the mistakes made in Rwanda — much remained to be done.

The panel underscored the enormous importance of peacekeeping, Mr. Carlsson told the press conference. Member states need to understand that peacekeeping is important and that the UN must carry out peacekeeping duties. "Rwanda clearly shows that if you are to have peacekeeping and, even more, peace enforcement, you must have the personnel and military resources, otherwise the damage will be larger than the benefit from peacekeeping," he said. ■

EAST AFRICA

A regional community is reborn

Presidents Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania, Daniel arap Moi of Kenya and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda signed a treaty on 30 November establishing a new East African Community (EAC), 22 years after a similar grouping of the three countries collapsed.

The treaty is to be ratified within six months. It calls for a customs union and common market, harmonized investment incentives, a regional tourism strategy, a regional stock exchange and, eventually, a monetary union and political federation. Since the three countries first pledged to establish the new EAC in 1997, they already have begun issuing common passports, made their currencies convertible and are presenting budgets to their respective parliaments simultaneously. ■

IMF

Strong GDP growth projected for Africa

During the first year of the new millennium, Africa's overall gross domestic product (GDP) should grow by around 5 per cent, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) projections. This will be significantly higher than the IMF's most recent estimates for 1999, when GDP grew by around 3.1 per cent. The improvement in 2000, argues the IMF's *World Economic Outlook*, can be partly attributed to "continued appropriate macroeconomic policies," but also to more favourable weather conditions, which boost farm output.

The overall result in 1999, the IMF also notes, masks wide differences among countries within Africa. Algeria and a number of smaller economies — including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mozambique, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia and Uganda — performed well, with GDP growing between 4 and 5.5 per cent. However, three of Africa's larger economies did rather poorly. Nigeria probably grew by only 0.5 per cent in 1999, largely because of low oil prices early in the year, followed by reduced oil output during the remainder of the year. South Africa's GDP increased by just 0.7 per cent, an improvement over the 0.5 per cent rate in 1998, and should improve further to 3.5 per cent in 2000. Morocco also grew slowly in 1999, by 0.6 per cent, mainly because of a drought-related decline in agricultural production. ■

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Koichiro Matsuura *(Japan) has been elected as the new Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for a six-year term beginning in November 1999. At the time of his election, Mr. Matsuura was Japan's Ambassador to France, and had earlier served as his country's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.*

Mr. Ablassé Ouédraogo *(Burkina Faso) has been appointed as one of four new Deputy Directors-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO). At the time of his appointment, Mr. Ouédraogo was Special Advisor to the President of Burkina Faso and had served earlier as Minister of Foreign Trade. He is the first African and the first representative of a Least Developed Country to be selected as Deputy-Director of the WTO or its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). WTO's three other new Deputy Directors-General are Mr. Paul-Henrie Ravier (France), Mr. Miguel Rodriguez (Venezuela) and Mr. Andrew Stoler (US). All four will serve until 30 September 2002.*